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REPRESENTING BLACKNESS
MOVE, THE MEDIA, AND THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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**A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Race and Ethnic Studies**

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN ETHNIC RELATIONS

JULY 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals to whom I remain indebted for their encouragement and support in completing this doctoral thesis. First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, Denice S. Morgan and Willie E. Morgan, Jr., for their boundless love, encouragement, and support, and for those long-distance telephone calls when they were needed most; as well as to my grandmother, Daisy Adams Morgan, who inspired my love of education and learning through her contagious delight at being at home in the world.

I would like to recognise, with immense gratitude, The Marshall Commemoration Commission and its staff for their financial support, care, concern, and patience over the past four years. Additionally, and in connection with the Marshall Commission, I would like to thank Cable and Wireless for their support during my third year of study at the University of Warwick, thus enabling my completion of the doctoral degree.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Muhammad Anwar, for his willingness to accept me as a doctoral student in the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations somewhat belatedly during my stay at the University of Warwick, and his support during my tenure under his care.

Regarding assistance during a particular stage in my archival research, I would like to express appreciation to the staff at the central branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia, who demonstrated pride and enjoyment in their work, thus facilitating the sense of hospitality that I experienced during my time in their home city. I benefited greatly from their willingness to share their local knowledge of Philadelphia as well as their assistance in tracing information pertinent to this project.

Lastly, I owe a great deal to Keya Ganguly and Charles Sugnet, who believed in the ideas motivating this thesis, perhaps long before I could grasp, as well as adequately articulate, the complexity of this project. For this, and much more, I remain grateful.

DECLARATION

I declare that the present thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university or institution of higher learning; therefore, it is principally the result of my tenure at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick.

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, black American political scholars have addressed the absence of transformative societal change in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. The civil rights initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s pledged racial equality and economic redistribution resulting from equitable, formal, political participation. For many, this promise remains unfulfilled. This thesis asserts that part of the problematic relates to a lack of theorisation regarding differentiation within the black 'community.' Specifically, it is concerned with a group of black activists in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania called MOVE, and the manner in which its emergence complicated a unitary conception of black community in the 1980s.

Formed on the cusp of the Reagan revolution, which signalled a retrenchment of civil rights initiatives nationally, combined with the election of a new cadre of black politicians at the municipal level—including Philadelphia, MOVE signifies the tenuous position in which these politicians found themselves during the Reagan era.

Thus, Philadelphia's first black American mayor, W. Wilson Goode, occupies a central role in understanding the conflicting demands with which this new crop of municipal officials had to contend during this politically volatile time period. Disabled from the task of simply performing their required duties, these men and women were the most accessible representatives of America's 'black community,' and thus embodied the most positive as well as the most negative aspects of the black American population. Therefore, their job description implicitly referenced their capacity to juggle the demands of being black in America.

This thesis will also investigate MOVE's representation in the print news media, as it received extensive coverage in the Philadelphia press. Through an analysis of three separate, local newspapers, this study attends to the racialised discourses characterising the group, thereby revealing a state of general anxiety regarding the place of blacks in American society. In this, a consideration of the media's impact upon Mayor Wilson Goode's career becomes a necessity, as the public's perception of his political suitability became inextricably linked with the fate of the MOVE members. Therefore, I attempt to determine how MOVE became 'news,' and in turn, how the group and officials in Philadelphia's city administration succeeded in mobilising the media as a resource for their own ends.

Considering MOVE's informal political strategies in tandem with the bureaucracy of formal municipal politics presents an opportunity to address the limitations of both electoral and cultural politics for the black population generally, as well as the persistent problem of political 'representation' within this context.

This thesis contributes to knowledge in black American cultural and electoral politics; social movements; the 'Sociology of the Negro' sub-discipline; the media and its role in conceptualising and coping with racial difference; and theories of blackness, liberalism and multiculturalism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies—Birmingham, England
CRS	United States' Justice Department's Community Relations Service
CYS	Children and Youth Services of Chester, Pennsylvania
FBI	United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation
NNPA	National Newspaper Publishers Association
PSIC	Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission
UDAG	Urban Development Action Grants Program

CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

Regarding the use of terminology describing the descendants of African slaves in North America, the principal term adopted throughout this study is 'black American.' While the ethnic appellation 'African-American' remains the designation deemed politically appropriate in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century usage, it retains the impetus to bypass the history of racially coded difference in the United States. In the instance of temporally specific terms such as Negro, Afro-American, and Black, and their relevance to particular studies, etc., their usage will be maintained for purposes of continuity and clarity.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

...A city burns on the screen. Any large city. Anywhere in America. CNN. Cable News Network. Row houses in flames. Rooflines silhouetted against a dark sky. Something's burning. We watch. Wonder whose turn it is now. Whole city blocks engulfed. It must be happening in another country. A war. A bombing raid. We're watching a Third World shantytown where there's no water, no machines to extinguish a fire. Flames, true to metaphor, do leap and lick. The sky retreats, jerks away like a hand from a hot stove. We are curious. We are impatient for the voice-over to tell us what to think. Where? When? Why? What? [...] But here it was, a jackpot consuming all our attention. Philadelphia.

Philadelphia.

West Philly. Osage Avenue.¹

This fragment from John Edgar Wideman's novel, *Philadelphia Fire*, represents the researcher's initial exposure to an event that took place on 13 May 1985 in the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although fictional, *Philadelphia Fire* includes fragments of local Philadelphia history, including information about the activist group motivating this event. The group in question called itself MOVE, a collective that emerged in the political milieu of the 1970s and sustained its activity into the 1980s.

Based within Philadelphia, MOVE stands out uniquely among black American 'resistance' or activist groups, by addressing the constraints under which black individuals and communities experienced the movement of everyday life. The group considered the terms of black citizenship to be unacceptable—as did the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam—but diverged from these groups in their style of political engagement: MOVE attempted to compose a philosophy that could have served as the foundation for an anti-racist struggle, one which lies outside of the discourse of citizenship as defined and determined by the state.

Specifically, MOVE looked toward neither a philosophy of inclusion, with regard to becoming acceptable from the perspective of state institutions, nor a philosophy of exclusion or separatism, thus collapsing the differential gradient between those identity struggles that were confined primarily to the 'legitimate' political arena and those of

¹ John Edgar Wideman, *Philadelphia Fire: a novel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990).

everyday life: the two struggles were rendered coterminous with one another, testing the limits and possibilities within a conception of ‘black politics.’

Although MOVE was not initially pro-black, its philosophy resonated strongly within Philadelphia’s black enclaves. Addressing issues such as police brutality, the overt surveillance of black neighbourhoods, and the inadequacy of urban housing, the group attained at least a level of respect if not support from many of Philadelphia’s citizens during its initial years of activism. However, it was also MOVE’s protest style that distinguished it from other political entities and subsequently created tension within the predominantly black neighbourhood in which it was based during the 1980s.

The majority of authoritative studies regarding MOVE centre upon the journalistic accounts of the death of eleven MOVE members—six adults and five children—in the 13 May 1985 conflagration on Osage Avenue resulting from actions on behalf of the city government. Most fail to elucidate the discursive framework that literary representations of the MOVE situation—such as Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire*—excavate from the rubble of media sensationalism surrounding this event. Although the death of MOVE members is significant, in the context of black American history the circumstances surrounding their deaths were not exemplary. The Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and participants in the Civil Rights Movement were also subject to oppressive treatment at the hands of American law enforcement. Infiltration by members of government agencies, assassinations of key figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, and the imprisonment of leaders such as Angela Davis characterise the dominant versions of black history in the United States. However, the discourses informing the MOVE situation differed from those hailing the ‘heroes and heroines’ of black resistance in the 1960s and 1970s. MOVE was portrayed as disconnected from an imagined black community because of its lifestyle.

This study is preoccupied with the manner in which events serve as a conductor for social anxieties existing within a particular historical framework. One such anxiety brought about by the presence of MOVE involves a rather static or essentialist conception

of 'blackness' or black identity. Therefore, reviewing the history of MOVE urges inquiry into the assertion of blackness as an essential quality within the individual, and subsequently the black 'community.'

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White state, "what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central."² In applying this formulation, the central thesis of this project posits the following: Although MOVE was a marginal entity in terms of black American politics and the history thereof, it is symbolically central in terms of illuminating issues that undercut the formation and management of these politics.

The events of May 1985 compel a sustained examination due to the manner in which social and political institutions reacted to the group, as well as the analyses resulting from such governing bodies. Rapidly, MOVE graduated from a neighbourhood nuisance to an entity terrorising a city. One of the ways in which the pulse of society can be measured is through an exploration of media forms, and it offers fruitful possibilities for an alternative understanding of MOVE.

The media's role is to relay current events to the wider public of whose interests it proclaims to represent objectively. Of course, a large amount of the work that the media performs is to construct a notion of what 'news' is in the first instance. Media forms such as mainstream newspapers, television, and radio networks, derive much of their authority from defining which human relations are valuable enough to be relayed to an audience. Partly, the creation of news is constrained by the access that reporters have to sources and informants, which in turn determines who has the ability to speak and be heard in society as well as which values are upheld, reproduced, or subject to transformation.

Returning to Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*, the media played an important role in defining his imagining of MOVE. This imagination or perception is already structured by

² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), my emphasis.

assumptions about what kinds of events happen where and to whom. It draws upon a reservoir of imagery constituted by national and international 'disasters' and the discourses surrounding them. Local newspapers such as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* actively set the framework within which public opinion was formed. This is not to portray the media as a conspiratorial mechanism in the sense of lauding its capacity to indoctrinate the public. However, the strength of the media lies in its ability to establish the terms for discussion, as it determines how a social phenomenon will enter the public arena.

Through an analysis of the media, this study presents an alternative understanding of the MOVE situation, one that considers the history of 'race relations' in the United States, methods of conflict resolution at a local or neighbourhood level, as well as conceptions regarding black American citizenship and belonging in the 1980s. Establishing the pervasiveness of racism in impacting upon black people is not the primary goal, rather the aim is to establish specific discourses that were instrumental in construing a particular vision of MOVE. Before explicating the objectives of this project, existing studies on MOVE will be addressed, as well as a brief account of MOVE's history in Philadelphia.

I. What is MOVE?

The majority of studies on Philadelphia and MOVE have taken the form of a linear exposition. Interested in veracity, the authors' task becomes one of mapping the precise sequencing of events on 13 May 1985. Although significant in assessing the degree of correspondence between defined social actors and the 'official' narrative, such accounts present limited options in addressing the complexity of the MOVE conflict.

The aim of this thesis is to move beyond this strategy in order to critically analyse the variety of disciplinary perspectives brought to bear on the MOVE situation. The focus will not rest solely upon the late history of the group on Osage Avenue, particularly the

significant moment of 1985, but its early period as well in 1970s' Powelton Village.

Although often overlooked, the 1970s provide an invaluable opportunity to consider the nature and the prominence of neighbourhood activism in Philadelphia. Descending from this is the external role of the city government in propelling particular group objectives to the forefront while neglecting others, thus sabotaging communal efforts at negotiation and resolution in both the 1970s and 1980s.

According to members of MOVE, Vincent Leaphart (later renamed John Africa) founded the organisation in the early 1970s in the radical neighbourhood of Powelton Village in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Situated near two universities—the Drexel Institute of Technology and the University of Pennsylvania—Powelton Village was “a racially integrated neighborhood that included students, university teachers, New Left groups, and collectives, and was a center of a variety of organizing activities.”³ Within this atmosphere, Leaphart, a Korean War veteran and ‘jack-of-all-trades,’ found an ideal spatial location within which to establish an enclave that mirrored his own beliefs. Leaphart attracted the attention of individuals looking for an alternative to the lifestyle options of the time. One such person was Donald Glassey, a master’s degree student in social work at the University of Pennsylvania.⁴ Together, Leaphart and Glassey developed the guidelines that would govern the initial formation and activities of MOVE.⁵

The headquarters of MOVE were established in Powelton Village, attracting a variety of individuals. Some existed on the margins of society, but others belonged to pre-existing activist groups, such as the Black Panthers. MOVE also drew those who were seeking a supportive family structure to which they would be welcomed; indeed, a few members were related to Vincent Leaphart. The group was composed of individuals,

³ Hizkias Assefa and Paul Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia: Extremist Groups and Conflict Resolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990/1988), p. 19.

⁴ There exists some ambiguity as to the role that Donald Glassey played in the formation of MOVE. It has been disputed as to whether he or Leaphart (John Africa) was the actual founder and initiator of MOVE activism. However, according to MOVE’s manifesto *25 Years on the MOVE* and public statements, John Africa is acknowledged as the founder and father to all members.

⁵ Craig R. McCoy, “Who Was John Africa?,” *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 12 Jan 1986: 18-28.

whose personal experiences emerged directly from an interaction with the city on a variety of levels, thus having an intimate knowledge of the everyday life of the locality. MOVE's activism centred on the 'local' and the 'communal' by taking-in and caring for animals, aiding the homeless and the elderly, and working within gang cultures to resolve disputes. Additionally, all of the members adopted the last name 'Africa' after the example set by their leader Vincent Leaphart/John Africa in "homage to Africa as the continent where all life began."⁶

Although difficult to summarise in its entirety, the philosophical tenets of MOVE were anti-system, meaning that the group rejected the use of all forms of technology and intervention of government into the lives of private citizens, including the application of the 'law.' Instead the members adhered to a so-called natural law, or government of the self.⁷ This anti-technological stance was extended to the appearance and functioning of the body. Therefore, the members grew dreadlocks as a means of wearing the hair without cutting and refused to use manufactured chemical cosmetics.⁸ Categorising MOVE is also a difficult task, as over the years they combined everything from 1960s environmentalist and communal counterculture, to an Afrocentric religiosity, to the posturing of militant revolutionary nationalisms exhibited by Black Power groups. Kathleen Neal Cleaver explains:

Indeed, the teachings of John Africa that had drawn each of them to the organization were a pastiche of themes exalted during the 1960s social revolution, such as non-violence, communal living, racial harmony, self-defense, protection of the environment, physical fitness, and nutritional fads. Above all, MOVE proclaimed that "the system" had to be destroyed because it was too corrupt to be reformed.⁹

Thus, it is useful to conceive of the group as religious cultural nationalists, a subject to be addressed in *Chapter 2*.

⁶ MOVE, *25 Years on the MOVE* (Philadelphia, 1996).

⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸ Kobena Mercer extensively analyses the symbolic importance of the black 'hair/style' in conceiving of identity. He explains that dreadlocks mark an "epistemological break" with 'white' standards of beauty, but retains the binary distinction of artificiality and naturalness. He states, "nobody's hair is ever just natural, but is always shaped and reshaped by social convention and symbolic intervention." See p. 105 of his *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. Ch. 4, "Black Hair/Style Politics," pp. 97-128.

⁹ Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Philadelphia Fire," *Transition* 51 (Spring 1991): 150-157.

There is the question of whether MOVE constitutes a social movement. In place of initiating a new phase or approach to black American politics, this study proposes that MOVE embodies the demise or decline of black American activism from the 1960s to the 1970s, thus selecting particular elements with which to fashion their new identity according to the philosophical and stylistic trends of its era. However, an evaluation of MOVE's status as a social movement will be reserved for the concluding chapter.

Continuing with the history of the group, MOVE was portrayed as an irrational, thoroughly un-modern, and temporally displaced group because of its emphasis on the health of the environment and its seemingly simplistic communal lifestyle. It was not necessarily MOVE's environmentalist stance *per se* that was attacked but its manifestation in the space of the Philadelphian community. MOVE's environmentalism was aggressive and considered anti-social by impeding positive neighbourhood relations. The rejection of the technological impositions of modern life such as waste disposal, running water, and electricity alienated the majority of its neighbours. The bodies of MOVE members and the space of the MOVE residence spilled over into and were perceived as contaminating public space. MOVE's presence exposed those aspects of urban communal living that are ideally hidden in the modern city, such as human waste, garbage, insects, and vermin. But these were the aspects of human life, of "lived" life that MOVE sought to embrace through its lifestyle. The group wanted to expose the truth of American society from human waste to the unjust treatment of black individuals.¹⁰

One could counter theoretical musings about MOVE with the practicalities of those who were forced to live with the physical manifestations of the group's philosophy. The intent is not to detract from the valid grievances of those questioning and rejecting MOVE's practices. Rather, within the contexts of Powelton Village and Osage Avenue, MOVE contested the neighbourhoods' reputations as tolerant and diverse.

¹⁰ In many respects, MOVE's philosophy was quite puritanical, contrary to their own assumption of 'radicalism,' but this was unrecognisable as a consequence of the group's tactics.

II. *Review of Existing Studies on MOVE*

Assefa and Wahrhaftig's account is one of the few studies that analyses the historical detail of MOVE's presence in Philadelphia prior to the 1980s. Approaching the MOVE situation through the lens of conflict resolution, the two authors assessed the development and impact of mediation methods in this scenario. However, although conflict resolution is the focal point, the study does not succeed in relaying the effectiveness of conflict resolution methods as applied to MOVE. In some cases, the need to follow conflict resolution methodology impedes upon other advancements made in their study. For example, in their concluding chapter, the authors posit categories for classifying actors in a violent and confrontational situation in an attempt to determine whether it would have been possible to solve the conflict with MOVE peacefully. The three classifications put forth were "crazies, criminals, and crusaders."¹¹ The authors concluded that the MOVE members were representative of the 'crusader' type, thus conceding that they possessed the capacity to think rationally. However well-intentioned, this type of classification masks the nuances of each mediation scenario illuminated earlier in their study.

In her review of *The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia*, Cleaver asserts that the study never fully grasps that conflict resolution was compromised initially due to the strained relations between law enforcement and black Philadelphians prior to the involvement of MOVE, creating "a sense of frustration and bitterness among Philadelphia's black community that MOVE both exploited and expanded upon."¹² Therefore, the conflict resolution process was inadequate in that this factor was discounted amongst the respective parties. She continues:

¹¹ Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, p. 41.

¹² Cleaver, "Philadelphia Fire," p. 153. As a former member of the Black Panther Party, Cleaver only explores a superficial link between MOVE's tactics and other strains of black American activism. In fact, she describes MOVE as a 'cult-like' organisation that preys upon individuals seeking a sense of belonging. Her analysis, lauding the demise of traditional social structures leading to a sense of fragmentation and a crisis in identity, is summarily dismissive of MOVE from the start and cites MOVE's neighbours as the 'true' victims.

Conflict resolution techniques are used successfully when they are substituted for the traditional means of solving disputes that courts or police employ. This never happened in Philadelphia—the police and the courts remained central players in precipitating and prolonging the MOVE crisis, with community negotiators playing peripheral roles that were soon written out of the script.¹³

Not only were the ‘traditional means of solving disputes’ maintained, but also, MOVE was never permitted to address its principal adversary: the Philadelphia Police Department. Strangely, although Assefa and Wahrhaftig do not address the positioning of the police department in conflict resolution mediation attempts, they do provide a psychological explanation for its absence.

When negotiations or other peaceful approaches are pitted against the force in hostage taking or terrorist conflicts, violence has an instinctual appeal. It promises instant and spectacular solutions. In contrast, the nonviolent approaches of negotiation and mediation appear to be too soft or to indicate weakness. They provide few opportunities for the participants to visibly demonstrate socially cherished characteristics of courage and heroism. [...] Nonviolent intervention aims at long-term relationships and often requires restructuring patterns of thinking and feeling.¹⁴

Thus, the policing and surveillance patterns of the Philadelphia Police Department remained unquestioned and did not figure into the conflict resolution process. One could then link the violent means used in the MOVE conflict to the use of everyday brutality by police officers on the streets of Philadelphia. If violence was permitted to exist unimpeded in regular policing practices, what then of a contentious situation involving a group already in the bad graces of the police establishment?

In contrast to the physical or actual mediation between individuals and groups analysed by Assefa and Wahrhaftig, Wagner-Pacifci examines mediation through language. Her *Discourse and Deconstruction* suggests that the discourse, or the language, used to refer to MOVE in official documents contributed to the inability to view MOVE members as capable individuals with whom dialogue was possible. The author’s explicit aim is to explore the connection between violence and language through the use of the MOVE situation as her case study. Utilising the technique of discourse analysis, Wagner-Pacifci identifies four discourses—domestic, bureaucratic, militaristic, and legal—that have shaped an official understanding of the MOVE conflict. In other words, these are the

¹³ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁴ Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, pp. 150-151.

languages with which MOVE was talked about and constructed within an official arena. She focuses on two “crystallising” moments: the events leading to 13 May 1985 and the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC) hearings.¹⁵ The documents of the PSIC hearings constitute the material ‘centrepiece’ of her analysis. Her claim is not that language creates violence or that there is a direct link between the two but rather that there is a correlation between the types of discourses used in and appropriated by the official domain and the conclusion that violence is the solution to a particular conflict.

Discourse and Destruction is instructive in relating the ‘official’ line on the MOVE situation. Due to her material focus on court transcripts, PSIC reports and videotapes, correspondence between MOVE’s neighbours and political representatives, as well as police surveillance notes, the study bridges the gap between assuming how MOVE was perceived by bureaucrats and law enforcement officers and the formal documentation of governmental action. However, this focus leads to a predominantly top-down analysis of the conflict. Some of MOVE’s usage of language is analysed, but the author does not document the evolution of its discourse(s) and how various shifts may have impacted upon the official and bureaucratic responses. Also, the issues of race and racialisation are marginalised in Wagner-Pacifici’s study. She includes a section on class and race with regard to the neighbours on Osage Avenue but conflates the two issues. Omitting a significant analysis of the interaction between race and class detracts from the interrogation of the four discourses selected for analysis. This is an absence that this study aspires to rectify through its own discursive focus.

An account by Margot Harry carries an analysis of race throughout its entirety. Harry, an investigative journalist, follows the style of reportage rather than that of an academic study, thus leading to a largely chronological account of events¹⁶; however,

¹⁵ The PSIC was a civil commission established in 1985 by the mayor at the time, Wilson Goode, to ascertain the city’s culpability in the aftermath of the 13 May 1985 conflagration.

¹⁶ See Harry’s *“Attention, MOVE! This is America!”* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1987). Other works in the same vein as Harry’s are: Michael and Randi Boyette’s *“Let It Burn!”: The Philadelphia Tragedy* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1989). The couple were also Philadelphia residents during the 13 May 1985 events; Charles W. Bowser’s *Let the Bunker Burn: The Final Battle with*

"Attention, MOVE! This is America!" is helpful due to the author's insights into her experience of events during the volatile year of 1985, as she was present in the Philadelphia area. For example, Harry contemplates the relevance of leadership in the black community, not only at the local level with figures such as Philadelphia's first black American mayor, Wilson Goode, but also at the national level with people such as Jesse Jackson. She notes that many leaders in the political and religious arena were concerned principally with maintaining the image of Goode as an effective black leader in the aftermath of 13 May 1985, therefore refraining from direct criticism of the actions taken and the resulting devastation.

Key national Black figures were also working overtime to "avoid non-constructive behavior" such as hostile action toward the police, and to funnel the anger of Blacks in Philadelphia and nationwide into official government channels. Not surprisingly, a chief firefighter was the Reverend Jesse Jackson [...] But the heart of Jackson's message was for people to calm down and to have faith that the authorities would eventually get to the bottom of what happened through carrying out various lengthy and thorough investigations.¹⁷

Harry's account contests the actions taken against both MOVE and its neighbours, and as such can be described as attempting to write history 'from below.' She links the 'counterinsurgency campaign' waged against MOVE to other destructive foreign interventions by the United States government, thus locating the MOVE situation within wider socio-historical and political movements. Additionally, Harry attached two appendices to the book. The first cites commentary from 'black activists and artists' concerning 13 May, while the second concerns the "Draw the Line" Campaign. This campaign was conducted in response to May 13 by political activists along the eastern seaboard of the United States, and gathered signatures from major political and cultural figures attesting to their condemnation of the 'massacre' of MOVE. These signatures were published in major newspapers. Such appendices attest to her commitment to construct an alternative history of the MOVE situation.

MOVE (Philadelphia: Camino Books, 1989). Bowser was an appointed member of Wilson Goode's Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC) and his book details the goings-on behind the commission's report; and John Anderson and Hilary Hevenor's *Burning Down the House: MOVE and the Tragedy of Philadelphia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987).

¹⁷ Harry, *"Attention, MOVE! This is America!"*, pp. 125-126.

Lastly, a dissertation by Suzanne Ife Williams considers the MOVE conflict as a case study of police brutality in Philadelphia.¹⁸ Williams conducts a “holistic analysis of legitimated violence on minorities” in which she analyses the seemingly contrary position of the state as both a protector of individual rights as well as an instrument of violent repression. This study usefully illustrates that police brutality is not simply an aberration in American law enforcement practice, as is often assumed. Rather, Williams proves that “the politico-legal structure has sanctioned violence towards Blacks through its reluctance to protect, prosecute violators, and minimal provision of redress to victims.”¹⁹ Williams excavates a legal framework from the national level downward that consistently abrogates its responsibility to purposefully address the overwhelming incidences of police brutality in the United States. Taking account of cases nationwide and concluding with the brutality charges brought against the Philadelphia Police Department, she connects the economic order of American capitalism to a formal legal rationality that legitimates the institutionalisation of legal repression against the nation’s poor and marginalised citizens.

In addressing MOVE specifically, the author utilises media accounts collected over a span of thirteen years, and was present for various legal proceedings, including the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission and the subsequent Grand Jury investigation. She also analyses organisations dedicated to combating police violence. She concludes that numerous illegal actions were undertaken to subdue MOVE throughout its history, and partly attributes this heinous disregard for legal precedent to the fact that MOVE was “considered an aberration in the realm of human behavior and [were] certainly to blame for the circumstances of their fate.”²⁰ While Williams’ study contributes greatly to a renewed understanding of MOVE, her analysis of the relations between black Americans and local governments often negates the possibility of agency for those involved. She presumes that blacks are led blindly or ‘duped’ by the system and

¹⁸ Suzanne Ife Williams, “Police Brutality: Case Study of Philadelphia/MOVE,” (PhD diss., Dept. of Political Science, Atlanta University, July 1988).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

therefore, there exists no political accountability for black politicians, community leaders, and police officers. Partly, this results from the author's preoccupation with and interpretation of various Marxist and neo-Marxist paradigms; however, a more complex view of the intersection between race, violence, politics, and economics is needed, one which the present study aims to proffer.

The purpose of this review is to exemplify some of the studies that have been conducted on MOVE as well as issues such as police brutality and black American leadership that will be drawn upon within the present study. There are additional works that expound upon other aspects of MOVE's history. For example, LaVon Wright Bracy's *Making Them Whole: A Philadelphia Neighborhood and the City's Recovery from the MOVE Tragedy* documents the effort to reconstruct the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood after the firebombing on Osage Avenue and the city's struggle to accommodate approximately two-hundred and forty homeless residents.²¹ Also of consequence is a survey of community responses to the MOVE conflict, titled *Voices from the Community*, which highlighted the salience of racial identification in the perceptions of the conduct of MOVE and the city.²² In addition to 'factual' accounts, there are a number of literary or fictional responses to the event.²³ These works will not be analysed here, but remain a valuable resource for further studies. From this point forward, the material considered thus far will be added to, deconstructed, and refocused in order to formulate a unique understanding of the MOVE situation.

²¹ LaVon Wright Bracy, *Making Them Whole: A Philadelphia Neighborhood and the City's Recovery from the MOVE Tragedy* (Philadelphia: Affie Enterprises, 1990). The author served as the city's liaison to the displaced residents in the aftermath of the conflagration, assisting them with accommodation, food and monetary allocations, as well as directing them in the processes of their permanent relocation and the rebuilding of their homes.

²² *Voices from the Community* and its addendum, *Reflections One Year Later: Personal Statements on the MOVE Tragedy* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1986).

²³ See, for example, Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*; his *Two Cities* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), also contains notable material on MOVE. Most notable of the poetic attempts is *Concerned Poets on the MOVE*, ed. by Sharon Leonard Goodman (Philadelphia: In the Tradition Press, 1986). This small collection compiles the work of Philadelphia poets.

III. *Objectives of the Study*

MOVE is an interesting case for further study, as the existing accounts largely discounted the continuing pervasiveness of racial ideologies in this period of American history. This is not to say that racist practices were not implicated in terms of police surveillance and brutality, or even a general assessment of the state of 'race relations' in the 1970s and 1980s—for this type of information in the form of case studies, official government statistics and reports are in abundance. However, there is an absence in black scholarship about how racism functions within and amongst communities composed of black individuals—to take into account not exterior modes of oppression but those that operate internally to rank individuals and groups and to discipline them into a particular mode of being.²⁴

With regard to MOVE, many scholars point to the absence of racism, even when taking into account the brutal activity on behalf of the state in May 1985, because the mayor at the time was black American. Because a black man was in power, his actions were regarded differently than if it had been a white man or woman in the mayoral seat. This assumption that blacks cannot be racist against other blacks, or, more simply, that blacks have each other's best interests in mind, has profound methodological implications for race and ethnic relations. It is an assumption deriving its validity from the proposition that black people have acquired a particular subjectivity by virtue of simply being black.

From the manner in which policies are derived in the 'handling' of people of colour at the governmental level to the somewhat subtler framework of constructing and managing 'good' neighbourhood relations, MOVE provides the opportunity to illuminate the faults in the way in which America's urban areas are conceived and maintained according to a particular communitarian philosophy premised on 'race.' In developing

²⁴See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (1977), (New York: Vintage, 1995/1975); and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld Press, 1967/1952).

this idea, a number of steps are necessary in order to address the problematic racial project of 'essentialising blackness.'

First, one must consider the difficulty of conceiving of alterity or 'otherness' within a particular community in a society that encourages belonging primarily through the construction of communities based on ethnic and/or racial difference. This does not deny that an attachment to others may have a basis in the perception of racial sameness or of experience; however, there is the distinct complication of what to do with those who do not heed this model of belonging or do not want to belong in the way in which the dominant discourse dictates.

Secondly, a society that implements a theory of multiculturalism subsequently privileges political representation or leadership according to the demarcation of one community from another. Accordingly, each community elects individuals who must represent an entire body of people on a presumed racial or ethnic affinity. Furthermore, the needs of the community are deemed to be simply racial or cultural needs. Pertinent to this thesis for example, the late 1970s and early 1980s signalled a burgeoning crisis in black leadership in the United States. There was a tendency for black politicians in the sphere of electoral politics to simply focus on the issue of race. In other words, their credibility rested on the sole fact of being black. This adherence to race-driven politics subsumed other crucial determinants of black individual and community life in the United States, such as class and gender relations. Of course, the issue of accountability for these politicians is complicated. If one is elected on a platform of purely racial issues, other considerations are neglected, thus negating the interests of others without adequate representation or a means of redress.

Thirdly, an adherence to race-based politics prevents or possibly even signals the inability to conceive of alternative politics. This does not necessarily imply radical politics, but simply another manner in which black Americans are enabled to participate politically. As aforementioned, this is one of the most intriguing issues surrounding the activities of MOVE, as the group was perceived to have by-passed the 'normal' political

routes. This leads, subsequently, to the issues of authority and respectability within this imagined black community. From whom does authority descend? Are black individuals or groups really in power and empowered, or are they merely ventriloquists for the interests of others? What does being politically respectable in American society entail? To address these questions, a selective genealogy of black political moments in the United States will be considered in *Chapters 2 and 3*.

The issues elucidated within these three brief points permit a meaningful discussion on MOVE to be entered into according to the thesis proclaiming the symbolic centrality of MOVE in illuminating the formation and management of black American politics. In focusing upon MOVE, this study will neither serve as a form of propaganda for the group nor as an authoritative indictment of it. The goal is to question the notion of a coherent black community, one that is constituted by members with the same political, cultural, and life aspirations. One must ascertain the function and consequences of this myth.

IV. Map of Thesis

An outline of the thesis will survey the content of each chapter, thus providing a general idea of how the study comes together as a whole. The outline is as follows: *Chapter 2: Conceptualising Blackness and the Black Community—Theoretical Issues* will stand as the principal theoretical section of the study. Epistemologically, this chapter addresses the contributions of the fields of sociology and race relations to the construction of a particular understanding of the black American subject and community. How do we know what we know about the ‘black subject,’ and how does this affect an understanding of the social? The so-called Sociology of the Negro continues to reverberate throughout the social sciences by influencing the manner in which researchers approach black individual or community ‘problems.’ Theories of race, ethnicity, and identity have all had their heyday in terms of the axis around which questions of blackness revolve, thus leading to

shifts of emphasis (yet retaining a pernicious degree of conservatism with regard to some sort of essence or validity of the concept of race) within the social sciences.

Of course, the proposition of a natural essence pertaining to race as a foundation of culture cannot be dismissed simply because it is fashionable to do so. Discarding the idea of an essential blackness or ‘the figment of the pigment’ as writer Caryl Phillips terms it, has significant consequences for conceiving of such taken-for-granted entities as the ‘black community’ and ‘black politics.’²⁵ Indeed, what are the consequences of relinquishing an idea of essential blackness, however vague, for those who wish to organise for social change within the racialised structures of society, while at the same time acknowledging the damning inadequacies of a society, a leadership, a community premised on a particular notion of what ‘black’ is and should be?

Following from a discussion of essentialism/anti-essentialism and the problematic of the black community, *Chapter 3: Black American Politics in the Age of Reagan—Historical Backdrop* will address the general historical context in which MOVE developed into a formidable local force. Of significance is the predominance of liberalism within American politics, as well as the wider political climate of the 1970s and the 1980s, specifically the regressive civil rights and economic policies of President Ronald Reagan. This conservatism dampened the revolutionary fervour of the previous two decades, creating an atmosphere of reserve and acquiescence on behalf of the designated black leadership of the time. Moving from the macro- to the micro-political context of Philadelphia politics, *Chapter 3* will then conclude with the racialised atmosphere surrounding the administration of Mayor W. Wilson Goode and its impact upon the MOVE conflict.

Chapter 4: Discourse and the Media—Methodological Issues will serve as the methodology section of the thesis, outlining the choices for the media material selected for analysis. This chapter will explicate the reasons for choosing discourse analysis as a

²⁵ See Phillips’ collection titled, *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), p. 93.

means to understanding how MOVE evolved from a neighbourhood annoyance, stirring up an exemplary amount of community coordination and communication, to a perceived group of local terrorists, hijacking American values. Of importance is the media's active role in creating 'events' and 'news,' not merely passively reflecting what is already present in the world.

Chapter 5: Defining Discourses—War and Terrorism is the first instalment of the media analysis, focusing upon the specifics of the media's attempt to define MOVE in a coherent and appealing fashion. At the forefront are the discourses of terrorism and the Vietnam War, which serve to amplify the severity of the situation, thus providing a public foundation for aggressive militaristic action. This chapter primarily analyses media material leading into the 13 May 1985 conflagration.

Chapter 6: Precipitating Discourses—The Debate Over Race subsequently addresses those discourses that emerged in the aftermath of the conflagration to re-situate the MOVE conflict. Here, the significance of race is a pertinent issue, and related to this is extensive commentary about Goode and his status as a 'black' mayor, as well as MOVE's dehumanisation through racial discourses pertaining to primitivism.

Chapter 7: The Role and Impact of the Media will review the preceding two chapters of media material through analysing the formal element of the newspaper editorial, as well as considering the deployment of the media by the city administration and MOVE. It will also offer a statement regarding the contributions that this mini-case study offers for an understanding of the MOVE situation.

Chapter 8: Conclusions will summarise the arguments presented in the previous seven chapters in order to address the proposed research question or thesis that MOVE, a group perceived to be a marginal entity in terms of black politics and the history thereof, is, in fact, symbolically central in terms of illuminating issues that undercut the formation and management of these politics within the United States of America. The importance of this effort will be ascertained through a consideration of current tendencies within the scholarship of black American culture and politics.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALISING BLACKNESS AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY

Theoretical Issues

I. The End of Innocence

In 1953, James Baldwin published an essay reflecting upon his experiences in a remote village in the mountains of Switzerland. As a black individual, Baldwin led a distinguished life amidst the peoples of this village due not only to his foreign status in a small place, but also to the fact that he was the first black man the villagers had ever seen. Well, almost. He explains,

There is a custom in the village—I am told it is repeated in many villages—of ‘buying’ African natives for the purpose of converting them to Christianity. There stands in the church all year round a small box with a slot for money, decorated with a black figurine, and into this box the villagers drop their francs. During the *carnaval* which precedes Lent, two village children have their faces blackened—out of which bloodless darkness their blue eyes shine like ice—and fantastic horsehair wigs are placed on their blond heads, thus disguised, they solicit among the villagers for money for the missionaries in Africa. Between the box in the church and the blackened children, the village ‘bought’ last year six or eight African natives. This was reported to me with pride by the wife of one of the *bistro* owners and I was careful to express astonishment and pleasure at the solicitude shown by the village for the souls of black folk. The *bistro* owner’s wife beamed with a pleasure far more genuine than my own and seemed to feel that I might now breathe more easily concerning the souls of at least six of my kinsmen.¹

Thus Baldwin is, and is not, the first black man ‘seen’ in this particular village. For the place of the black figurine in the church, in addition to the *carnaval* activities, have already prefigured Baldwin’s entrance. Although the villagers had not encountered a living black individual before, ‘Africa’ played a prominent role in village life. This construction of Africa constituted a permanent part of religious practice, as well as structured relations among the villagers themselves and with Baldwin.

In Baldwin’s experience, it was his blackness and this assumed connection to Africa that constituted the focus of the villagers’ assumptions about him. This preoccupation with Baldwin’s physicality is not a given variable, in that ‘race’ ought to be automatically elevated to the difference that matters most in human relations. However,

¹ Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” in *Notes of a Native Son* (London: Penguin, 1995/1964), pp. 153-154.

given this historical context, racial ideas can be assumed to play an important role in human interaction.

Rather than contemplate whether the villagers were malicious in their intent, as such an argument has limited purchase in a discussion of racism, Baldwin ponders the construction of knowledge regarding black people. He characterises the village as naïve or innocent, but the twist lies in the proposition that this innocence is maintained at the expense of previously acquired knowledge. Baldwin accomplishes this by identifying the inconsistencies between discourses of Christian salvation coupled with the corresponding enterprises (from actual enslavement to donating one's weekly franc to the church), and the treatment of black people as subhuman. This inconsistency brings into relief this willed innocence, which is, in fact, a masquerade obscuring power relations between people.

Being American, and specifically being black in America, guided Baldwin's judgements. At the beginning of the essay he muses, "It did not occur to me – possibly because I am an American – that there could be people anywhere who had never seen a Negro."² The American experience is crucial in Baldwin's theorisation of race relations, as the presence of blacks on American soil persistently threatened the philosophy upon which the nation was founded—a situation which sociologist Gunnar Myrdal termed the "American dilemma." The philosophy of America—roughly life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—juxtaposed with the enslavement of black people thrust the country into a state of ideological crisis. Thus, denying the applicability of this philosophy to black people risked nullifying the foundation upon which America rests, yet, conceding it risked rendering the status of America as a white nation questionable.

Baldwin concludes by stating that both blacks and whites in America have undergone a profound change as a result of their interaction. Whites can no longer afford to perceive of America as a white nation, of fostering "the illusion that there is some means of recovering the European innocence, of returning to a state in which black men

² Ibid., p. 151.

do not exist [...] This world is white no longer and it will never be white again.”³

Conversely, black Americans are also inescapably bound to the history of their country, and unlike other black men of the world, there is no recourse to a facile African history, as “any American Negro wishing to go back so far will find his journey through time abruptly arrested by the signature on the bill of sale which served as the entrance paper for his ancestor.”⁴ Hence, blacks have no choice but to construct an American identity that represents their status as actual citizens and contributors to the country in which they live. However this construction is always to some degree responsible or answerable to the identity that has been imposed from without. Baldwin writes, “[b]ut I must accept the status which myth, if nothing else, gives me in the West before I can hope to change the myth.”⁵

II. The End of the Essential Black Subject

Nearly forty years after James Baldwin’s call for ‘the end of innocence’ concerning American race relations, Stuart Hall theorised a similar appeal from a different angle. He proclaimed that the time had come for the ‘end of the essential black subject,’ thereby addressing a willed naïveté regarding black history and culture. Through this formulation, Hall addressed black individuals and theorists of ‘blackness’ and cultural difference to draw their attention to the fictive nature of an essential, historically transcendent black identity.

Leading Hall to the point where he posited the ‘end of the essential black subject’ was the question of politics and its link to various forms of identity or ‘identity politics.’ Hall argues that although one may identify as a homosexual male, for example, does not necessarily presume a political position whereby one advocates a repeal of laws banning gay marriage, affirmative action strategies, or reproductive rights for women. Similarly,

³ Ibid., pp. 164-165.

⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

if one is black American, he or she cannot be labelled automatically in favour of anti-racist policies or an objector to the multifarious forms of United States imperialism. Hall's point is that one's identity neither dictates nor presumes the nature of one's politics. Although a simple proposition, this de-linking of modes of identification from politics is indeed revelatory and allows one to value the complex, if not contradictory, nature of subject positions.

In "New Ethnicities," Hall postulates that we have entered an era in which there has been a shift towards the politics of representation from the relations of representation; this shift establishes that 'regimes of representation' play a formative role in social life instead of merely a reflective one.⁶ Although Hall's context is Britain, his essay has relevance for black cultural politics in the United States as well. This shift in representation results from two instances. He writes,

First, it is the effect of a theoretical encounter between black cultural politics and the discourses of a largely Eurocentric, largely white, critical cultural theory which in recent years has focused so much analysis on the politics of representation. [...] Secondly, it marks what I can only call 'the end of innocence', or the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject.⁷

On a first reading it may appear as though Hall and Baldwin were making similar statements. However, Hall's notion of 'the end of innocence' focuses on the constructed identities of black individuals that were formulated in response to the overtly negative ones that have been imposed by a largely white cultural and economic enterprise, while Baldwin's explanation focuses on the responsibility of white individuals to free themselves from a false naïveté regarding power relations between themselves and descendants from the African continent. Primarily, Hall is attempting to relay the notion that 'black' is as constructed category as that of 'white,' and, furthermore, there has been a tendency in certain cultural circles to essentialise the meaning of blackness, to make it a conglomeration of inherent qualities. He highlights the responsibility of black people to

⁶ Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," pp. 252-259 in A. Rattansi and J. Donald, eds., *'Race', Culture & Difference* (London: Sage/Open University Press, 1992).

⁷ Ibid., pp. 253-254. For a fuller elaboration of the concept of representation by Hall, see his edited collection, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage/Open University Press, 1997), particularly Ch. 1: 'The Work of Representation.'

move beyond this stage where black identities are consolidated purely in response to oppressive white identities, a strategy that merely reinforces and perpetuates the destructive tendencies of racial thinking.

What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experiences of black subjects. This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term black will either guarantee the effectivity of cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value.⁸

Here, Hall points to a politics operating "through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject."⁹ Although attractive, such reversals fail to challenge the foundations of the race relations' debate.

Proposing the 'essentially good black subject' merely pays homage to the same racist foundations of the essentially good white subject. This is not to suggest that the two carry the same weight, as it is a far more tenuous political project to enforce blackness as a hegemonic political strategy than whiteness. Additionally, Hall's proclamation opens the floodgates as to how particular representations serve to repress the needs and objectives of various social groupings within the black population. In the American context, conceptions of the 'good' black subject arose in response to demands for respectable citizens, which emanated from predominantly white-controlled social institutions. For example, there were persistent pressures, from both black and white social groupings, to rid the black community of its 'problematic' reputation and to assimilate politically and culturally into the rest of the nation.¹⁰ The problem arises when the black population reifies such conceptions by investing in them an unwarranted material value, when these ideas become the controlling factor of an entire population.

⁸ Ibid., p. 254.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The discipline of sociology played an influential role in defining the black community as problematic and even pathological, a point that shall feature in greater detail in the upcoming sections.

Those excluded from these conceptions either by choice or circumstance are banished from the realms of 'true' blackness and characterised as boils on an already plagued community; consequently, these individuals are often the subject of attacks by both the dominant white social institutions and culture as well as by other blacks.

Hall chooses to focus mainly on the 'critical politics' that are avoided by essentialising blackness, but he does not address the damage suffered by black individuals as a result of this strategy. Undoubtedly the development of a critical politics would entail a radical interrogation of the history of representation in black communities and black politics, reviewing the ways in which particular groups have been silenced and policed. This is not a regressive, but a fundamentally necessary process for the progression of any political strategy.

Furthermore, Hall's proclamation is motivated by the resurgence of whiteness. Although a full discussion will not be taken up here, this element presents possibilities for reconsidering Hall's argument. Contrary to Baldwin's expectations in 1953, whiteness has gained strength in the ensuing decades by adopting the demands and structures of ethnicity or racially based politics. Earlier, the term 'identity politics' was put forth when speaking of the manner in which black communities sought to mould themselves in order to be recognised by the largely white establishment. However, groups identifying as 'white' are also utilising the language and the discourse of ethnicity, race, and identity; previously, these were the unspoken reserve of non-white populations. This issue will resurface in *Chapter 3* with regard to the Reagan Administration.

Ethnicity, by enabling the revival of racist ideology by essentialising culture and history, has lent a certain viability to white supremacy, as it allows whites to be placed on the same terrain as other marginalised groups. Although Hall acknowledges the dangers of 'ethnicity' to some extent by referring to (in the British context) an 'exclusive and regressive form of English national identity,' he does not suggest how one should consider ethnicity in light of his theory of the essential black subject. 'New ethnicities,' as a catchphrase, is evocative of the old essentialisms; it only proposes new possibilities for

representing them. Also, Hall has yet to bring his readers to the point where we are asked to consider the salience of the term 'black' for the future. 'Black' as a modifier/adjective is not questioned, but its subjects (in the grammatical sense) are, i.e. black feminism, black aesthetics, black music, and so forth. We begin to move in a different direction once blackness is put forth as a theoretical problem.¹¹

However, before taking anti-essentialism on board completely, it is also necessary to posit its usage in a manner that Hall may not have intended. In other words, although an anti-essentialist perspective encourages the recognition of a plurality of identities and political positions, what exactly does this accomplish, what does it mean? Hortense Spillers powerfully states that " 'Anti-essentialism' is, therefore, an indictment; it is not an analysis."¹² In other words, anti-essentialism gains credence from its ability to identify instances of 'essentialism,' but this process in itself is not a sufficient analysis of the character and consequences of racial thinking. Additionally, anti-essentialism remains a theoretical viewpoint, and although it espouses anti-foundationalist claims, this rejection of a foundation or an essence is a foundation nonetheless. For Spillers, to proclaim anti-essentialism and proceed by excavating its instances is not an adequate response to the vagaries of racism. She states:

Even if we decide that the meaning is fictional and fantastic, we will find no expulsion in the comfort of that thought from the *consequences* of it. And the question of *meaning*—an ethical one that is not put to rest by philosophical action, though it might be *informed* by it—is a *political* question, played out on the conflicted terrain of power getting and power sharing.¹³

¹¹ I have taken this cue from Rey Chow who attempts to situate Chineseness as a question of ethnicity, of culture. Her observations are relevant to a consideration of blackness, as it also assumes the cloak of culture. The premise of Chow's argument is that ethnicity is often reduced to anthropological claims of cultural difference which serve to naturalise or make cultural issues attributable to biological differences. Chow's point is that Chineseness, or any ethnic signifier, needs to be contextualised and read in terms of its historical origins, the conditions of its construction, and the shifting conditions of its usage. See "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," in *boundary 2*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 1-24. For an earlier rendering of the same problematic see Allen Chun's "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity," in *boundary 2*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 111-138.

¹² Hortense J. Spillers, " 'The Little Man at Chehaw Station' Today," p. 16 in *boundary 2* vol. 30, no. 2, (2003): 5-19.

¹³ Ibid. Spillers also implies that the invocation of anti-essentialism can function in a condescending and paternalistic manner, as its proponent suggests that he or she stands outside of the racial framework in question. Spillers argues that anti-essentialist projects often caricature their object of critical inquiry, thus facilitating the ease of the critical process and heightening the sense of intellectual acuity. This perhaps mirrors her concern that intellectuals of colour, or those from

Drawing from Spiller's argument, therefore, anti-essentialism is not an automatic response to the problematic of race. Often the anti-essentialist project is engaged in a fruitless practice of naming essentialist instances and shaming the accused culprit. Spiller suggests that this hasty appropriation of the anti-essentialist cause may increase the difficulty of combating and analysing racist practices, as those waging anti-racist struggles are often accused of affirming 'race' in the process of addressing its consequences.¹⁴

Both Hall and Spillers offer important points that resonate with the remainder of this study. Hall's coinage, 'the end of the essential black subject' is an important formulation, but one must go beyond merely declaring the fact that there is no essence to blackness. Differing representations of blackness must be historically situated in order to grasp the salience of particular political positions and their relevance for a study of racial relations.¹⁵ The argument here is that Hall does not so much 'de-essentialise' blackness, as much as he opens up space for critical thinking on the heterogeneity of black subject positions. Therefore, 'the end of the essential black subject' is perhaps more successful in

marginalised constituencies, are often browbeaten with essentialism in their attempts to critique the power differential in race relations. Consequently, criticisms of racist practice and resistances to these practices are ignored or obscured in the hasty attempt to label one as an essentialist. Thus, relations of power are reinscribed in intellectual circles by again determining the conditions upon which knowledge is deemed valid.

¹⁴ This argument regarding anti-essentialism resonates as well with Nikhil Pal Singh's concept of "antiracist universalism." He explains: "This form of antiracism, which I call *antiracist universalism*, tends prematurely to dissolve race in its earnest desire to transcend racism. Indeed, this form of antiracism has frequently had great difficulty distinguishing its attacks on the color line from its discomfort and even antipathy toward the real objects of racial discrimination. What antiracist universalism has had the hardest time coming to terms with is the legacy of racially coded difference itself. Failing to eradicate this difference once and for all, its bewildered idealism often turns into vengeful resentment against those who initially evoked concern." See p. 35 in "Towards an Effective Antiracism," pp. 31-51 in Manning Marable, ed., *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Ella Shohat makes a similar point as she states: "Framing the debate simply around 'essentialism/anti-essentialism,' in other words, proves to be theoretically and politically limited. Whether or not to return to essentialist origins isn't the point; the question is what exactly is being mobilized in the articulation of the past, and, further, what should be the different modes of interconnectedness with collective experiences for a politically viable set of identities, identifications, and representations." See p. 175 in "The Struggle Over Representation: Casting, Coalitions, and the Politics of Identification," pp. 166-178 in Román de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan, and Michael Sprinker, eds., *Late Imperial Culture* (London: Verso, 1995).

recognising the plurality within a defined collectivity rather than dismantling or negating blackness completely.

Setting aside the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate, we will move forward to consider how ‘blackness’ became a subject of theoretical inquiry. In order to purposefully grasp American race relations and the manner in which black Americans have been located within this framework, it is imperative to consider how blackness has been theorised both on an individual and a communal level. This is not an attempt to reconstruct a comprehensive lineage of blackness *per se*; rather, specific works have been selected so as to illuminate a series of relevant considerations.

III. *The Fact of Blackness*

“Dirty nigger!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro!”

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.¹⁶

These are the opening lines from “The Fact of Blackness,” one of Frantz Fanon’s seminal essays regarding ‘blackness’—or the substance of black identity. Fanon situates this essay as “portray[ing] the Negro face to face with his race,” the black individual coming to terms with *being*. Psychiatrist, philosopher, and anti-colonial activist, Fanon was born in Martinique and studied psychiatry in France. Although references made to his writings today draw more upon his theories of revolution and the workings of post-independence nationalism, the attention that Fanon dedicates to the mental state and the psyche of the colonised/oppressed individual should not be overlooked.¹⁷ To the extent that his work influences the manner in which blackness enters into discussion today, it is worth exploring this essay in some detail before proceeding.

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” pp. 109-140 in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Weinfeld Press, 1967/1952), p. 209.

¹⁷ For historical reasons, one should be loath to introduce an overt psychological strain into this consideration of blackness, as it has often been used as a ploy to divert proper attention from the institutional and structural constraints placed on oppressed constituencies in general. However, it is also injurious to deny a psychological component in the formation of identities, and in this, Fanon’s work is pioneering and exemplary.

“The Fact of Blackness” is fundamentally an existential inquiry from the perspective of a black individual (gendered male). For Fanon, the black man’s attempt to “know thyself,” to attain subjectivity, is fettered by the condition of race and by the knowledge of him, a knowledge constructed by the ‘white’ world. He specifically addresses existential philosophy and its deceptively universal claims, describing the agonising process through which he realises that this body of knowledge, so revered by the white world as speaking for the whole of humanity, is not adequate to his situation as a black man.

The essay, which can be conceptualised as consisting of three movements, traces Fanon’s attempt to elucidate the process through which the black man attains subjectivity. The first movement entails a state of fragmentation, of alienated consciousness where the author analyses the black man’s visual perception and construction of himself. In this period, he perceives himself as being fixed within the boundaries of his blackness. The black man cannot think of himself as anything other than *the* Other because he is alienated from his own corporeal presence. He has accepted the definition of *self* that the white world/ the colonisers have provided him. Fanon explicates the black man’s effort to rationalise his way out of this alienated consciousness armed with a battery of European intellectual weaponry, but this attempt fails so he turns to its opposite, the irrational.

For Fanon, Negritude, the second intellectual and cultural movement of black affirmation, encompasses all that is “irrational”; it is the black man’s way of reclaiming all that was rejected under the rational umbrella of the white world and elevating all things ‘black’ or African to the ideal position. Negritude also created a new respectable being—called the Negro. But this resolution to the Negro’s existential problem is incapable of producing the self-consciousness or subjectivity sought by Fanon. He writes,

For once, that born Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain consciousness of self. In opposition to rationalism, he summoned up the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its worth from an almost substantive absoluteness. A consciousness committed to

experience is ignorant, has to be ignorant, of the essences and determinations of its being.¹⁸

In other words, Negritude, like existentialism, is also inadequate to the situation of the black man because blackness becomes as 'absolute,' as scientific as its European counterpart and therefore denies the black individual the opportunity to envision the future or the past anew: Blackness becomes essentialised to the detriment of black people. This returns us to the crux of Hall's anti-essentialist argument. Fanon is incapable of the ignorance that is needed for Negritude to function because he does not want to accept the completely present, but stagnant state in which his consciousness is held out to him by history—the absoluteness of which he speaks in this passage. Where does one progress to with Negritude except to fulfil the teleology of history? This rationalised irrationalised subjectivity does not alleviate the existential problem of the Negro.

The third movement in "The Fact of Blackness" is a disregard for any attempt to rationalise or 'irrationalise' the subjectivity of the Negro. Fanon realises that the subjectivity of the Negro, *his* subjectivity, is neither an alienated presence to be located within the spatial and temporal framework of a rational world, nor an absolute presence that is "already there, waiting for that turn of history" posited by Negritude. At the end of the essay, Fanon posits a new subjectivity that is not determined by the past or future—it cannot be grasped with the intellectual tools present in the hands of the Negro. This subjectivity signals its existence through an infinite absence, "straddling Nothingness and Infinity"; it must be created anew.¹⁹

Although abstract, Fanon's three movements of 'blackness' resonate acutely with many colonial or post-colonial situations, past and present. Returning to the first movement concerning an alienated or a negatively imposed outsider consciousness, Baldwin's narrative, "Stranger in the Village," puts flesh on the bones of Fanon's theory of being confined to one's blackness. One should recall the images of blackness that plague Baldwin from the moment he enters the village; he has been fixed within a

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

particular context from which it is difficult to escape and to set oneself apart emotionally and intellectually. The second movement, wherein Negritude initially is posited and then rejected as a response to Eurocentric ontological and existential theories, draws out a common element in nationalist movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the propagation and making absolute a particular version of history. The third movement represents the underlying drive and intention of this theoretical inquiry. It is necessary to address the social structures enabling the continued reification of a particular construction of blackness to the detriment of black people and black communities before contemplating a 'new' kind of subjectivity, one that remains distant perhaps for many. However, conceptualising Fanon's work on a wider scale than that of the individual involves tenuous transpositions and manoeuvres. Recent writers have attempted to use his psychological expositions as a foundation for social movements, but what potentialities emerge when the boundaries of Fanon's theory are expanded?

IV. *Blackness and Community Formation*

Literary theorist Rey Chow has explored a neglected aspect of Fanon's writings on blackness: the issue of community formation and its relation to gender and sexuality. Her essay "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon"²⁰ references critics who have adopted Fanon's theory of the black subject and extrapolated theories of the post-colonial community or nation. Chow takes issue with this approach and reveals the difficulties of such an undertaking.

Chow's basic point could be summarised thus: Fanon's decolonised subject does not *become* in a vacuum; this subject exists in a society with structural limitations

²⁰ Rey Chow, "The Politics of Admittance," pp. 55-73 in *Ethics After Idealism: Theory—Culture—Ethnicity—Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). See also essays in a collection on Fanon and representation that specifically address "The Fact of Blackness" entitled, *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. by Alan Read (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996).

whether they are remnants from the departing colonial power or ones newly created in order to adjudicate the formation of an independent society. Additionally, Chow emphasises that Fanon's subject is explicitly gendered male. Her critique of community formation via Fanon's theory of the black subject turns on this issue of gender: What role, what agency is the woman of colour permitted in the formation of the new community if she is excluded from consideration in the first instance?

In grounding her argument, Chow posits the concept of admittance as integral to the process of community formation. She identifies three modes of admittance, or attaining community membership: First is the "physical sense" of entering or letting one enter. Following from the physical/spatial sense of admittance is that of "recognition," "validation," and "acknowledgement." Lastly is 'admittance' as a mode of confession. "Insofar as confession is an act of repentance, a surrender of oneself in reconciliation with the rules of society, it is also related to community."²¹ Chow's articulation of admittance encourages a re-evaluation of the nationalist project, whereby independence and autonomy can no longer be put forward as utopian and universal objectives.

One might query as to how race or skin colour becomes integrated into Chow's analysis. Returning to her reading of Fanon's work, "the conceptualization of a community alternative to the colony is thus inseparable from a heightened awareness of race as a limit of admittance."²² This 'heightened awareness of race' as a condition for community formation develops by default, as it is the refusal of the white man to admit the man of colour (admittance in the first two senses of letting enter and validation) into his community. Therefore the race of the man of colour is held out to him as a *lack* or an absent quality that bars his attainment of equal membership to that community which he desires to enter. In the moment of imagining a new community as well as mobilising for one, race/skin colour then becomes the element to which nationalists attribute the ability to incorporate those who have been excluded from the coloniser's community. Indeed,

²¹ Ibid., p. 57.

²² Ibid., p. 58.

one might question the viability and sustainability of a community formed in opposition to, but paradoxically structured in accordance with the dictates of the excluding community. Chow inquires:

But how does race operate as a new type of admittance ticket, a new communal bond? On close reading, it would seem that race, in spite of the fact that it is imagined at the revolutionary moment as the utopian communion among people who suffer the same discrimination, nonetheless does not escape the problems structural to all processes of admittance. The issue of admittance—of legitimate entry and validation—become especially acute when we introduce sexual difference—when we read the different manners in which Fanon describes the black man and the black woman.”²³

Drawing from the work of psychotherapist and philosopher Sigmund Freud as well as that of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Chow asserts that the woman of colour is an object of exchange value.²⁴ Unlike men, the acquisition of status within the community for women is dependent upon their ability to facilitate relations within and between communities. Also, because of their reproductive role, the sexuality of women is guarded due to the potential of the boundaries of the community to be transgressed. However, the analysis of women’s sexuality is never pushed beyond the limits of community formation or kinship. The woman of colour in Fanon is not given the same analytical weight as the man of colour. Compared to the soul-searching, existential crisis through which the man of colour endures in “The Fact of Blackness,” for example, the woman of colour is attributed no such theoretical complexity.²⁵ Here, Chow refers specifically to a chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* titled “The Woman of Colour and the White Man” where Fanon addresses the sexuality of the woman of colour. This is the only chapter in which Fanon focuses on the position of women in the context of decolonisation; elsewhere women are simply considered part of ‘the people’ or ‘the masses.’ Chow makes it clear in this account that Fanon does not deny the woman of colour agency. Instead he bestows upon her “a very specific kind of appearance and agency,” one predicated on the woman of colour’s sexuality alone.²⁶ “Most crucially, this construction, because it admits women as

²³ Ibid., p. 58.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 59.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

sexuality and nothing more, leaves no room for the woman of color to retain her membership among her own racial/ethnic community.”²⁷

Extracted from Chow’s work are the complex manoeuvres involved in the proposition of community, particularly one that is conceived in opposition. How can a community take action against oppressive forces if a significant segment of its population (women) is relegated to the role of outsider-within and considered absent from the realms of true blackness? Often dismissed and ignored, sexuality and gender nonetheless play an integral role in the conceptualisation of the black community and the challenges of community formation.²⁸

Although Fanon’s “The Fact of Blackness” is not the only foray into theorising blackness, his is perhaps one of the clearest and poignant expositions of the issues that bear on black identity politics today; secondly, his work provides an acknowledged blueprint for contemporary writers on the subject. Though theoretically abstract and seemingly distant from a consideration of the way in which black communities are formed and become operative, his rendering of blackness, and Chow’s acute critique of his work have practical implications for black politics in the United States and are relevant to the present study.

A. Sociology and the Black Community

The discipline of sociology and the sub-field of race and ethnic relations have implicitly asserted the perspective that Chow extrapolates from the writing of Fanon: black women/women of colour feature prominently within the black community as a source of conflict and division. However, the sociological approach is less concerned about the “blackness” of women and the formation of a community of resistance; rather the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

²⁸ Perhaps the most recent manifestation of this problematic is the furore over the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings, which laid bare the issue of belonging and ‘place’ of men and women in the black American community, as well as demonstrating the conflicting demands of identity politics.

preoccupation of sociology resides in the adaptability of the black community to the “American” way of life. ‘Assimilation’ has been the operative term to describe how ethnic groups have conformed to the American mould. Because the large majority of black people have not achieved the same degree of prosperity as other immigrant groups, this population has been bestowed the label of the problematic or pathological community.²⁹

Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* epitomises this approach.³⁰ An impressive piece of social science research, *An American Dilemma* remains a signature piece in the study of race and ethnic relations, and the impact of Myrdal’s conclusions reverberate throughout the field today. However, one of his premises is that the Negro community has failed to assimilate effectively into the larger American community due to ‘caste pressures’ and the failure of the white American public to adhere to a set of moral and political values that Myrdal effectively terms the ‘American Creed.’

The American Creed is not merely—as in some other countries—the implicit background of the nation’s political and judicial order as it functions. To be sure, the political creed of America is not very satisfactorily effectuated in actual social life. But as principles which *ought* to rule, the Creed has been made conscious to everyone in American society.³¹

For Myrdal, the American Creed embodies what America ought to be. Therefore, the dilemma of white American society, for which Myrdal titled this study, is the refusal to grant the Negro population equal access to those ideals embodied in the American Creed. To encapsulate this relation, the author introduces the ubiquitous phrase: ‘the Negro problem.’³²

Although Myrdal holds white American society accountable to its political and moral ideologies, this rendering of ‘the Negro problem’ and the proposed resolution thereof is problematic for two immediate reasons. Firstly, Myrdal assumes the conceptual inclusivity of the American Creed, to which he attributes roots in Enlightenment

²⁹ Crucially, the comparison between black Americans and other immigrant groups is a false one.

³⁰ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

philosophy. The Enlightenment rested on a premise of 'man' to which (white) women and lesser beings were excluded. One of the means by which slavery escaped moral condemnation in some religious and philosophical circles was the refusal to grant blacks and people of colour the status of human beings. Consequently, the realisation that white Americans have denied Negroes political equality is unsurprising: They were implicitly excluded through the oblique term 'man' that permeates the nation's founding documents. In the time period that Myrdal was conducting his study, black men were struggling to make 'man' applicable to or inclusive of their black bodies to the detriment of the political status of black women. In this, the perspicuity of Rey Chow's argument becomes apparent. This struggle, which coincided with and inspired the women's suffrage movement, had yet to exhaust itself even in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. Secondly, the author's resolution of 'the Negro problem' depends upon the fulfilment of the ideals of the American Creed; therefore, if the Negro community fails to assimilate effectively into society with the enforcement of equal political access, 'the Negro problem' becomes defined in terms such as 'the natural inferiority of the Negro' or 'the inherent pathological nature of the Negro community,' terms which have already presented themselves in *An American Dilemma*, only under the auspices of 'caste repression.' In other words, the emphasis would shift from caste repression to a cultural explanation of the problematic 'nature' of the Negro.³³

³³ Myrdal states in a section titled 'The Negro Community as a Pathological Form of an American Community': "*In practically all its divergences, American Negro culture is not something independent of general American culture. It is a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of the general American culture.* The instability of the Negro family, the inadequacy of educational facilities for Negroes, the emotionalism of the Negro church, the insufficiency and unwholesomeness of Negro recreational activity, the plethora of Negro sociable organizations, the narrowness of interests of the average Negro, the provincialism of his political speculation, the high Negro crime rate, the cultivation of the arts to the neglect of other fields, superstition, personal difficulties, and other characteristic traits are mainly forms of social pathology which, for the most part, are created by the caste pressures.

This can be said positively: *we assume that it is to the advantage of American Negroes as individuals and as a group to become assimilated into American culture, to acquire the traits held in esteem by the dominant white Americans.* This will be the value premise here. We do not imply that white American culture is "higher" than other cultures in an absolute sense. The notion popularized by anthropologists that *all* cultures may be good under the different conditions to which they are adaptations, and that no derogatory association should *a priori* be attached to primitive cultures, is a wholesome antidote to arrogant and erroneous ideas closely bound up with

Myrdal invokes anthropological theories of cultural relativity, where no value judgments are placed on an individual culture or cultural institution because of its specificity. However, contrary to his assertions, he compares 'Negro culture' with 'American culture.' He asserts that 'caste pressures' prevent Negro culture from evolving to the more desired state of (white) American culture. His construction of the Negro community makes no allowance for the possibility of black American contributions to the American way of life and American history. Interestingly, the indivisibility of American culture is part of the problematic that Myrdal's social scientific study attempts to elucidate. Had he followed through with this initial premise, he would not have been able to declare, with such boldness, the pathological nature of American Negro culture.

B. The Black Family as Black Community

The familial structure has been the focal point or the organising principle in social scientific studies addressing the 'pathology' of black American culture. The nuclear family dynamic became the burning issue in the 1930s and 1940s and remains prominent on the agenda of black American politics today. A preoccupation with 'family' returns us to the issue of gender and sexuality.

Prior to Myrdal's study, E. Franklin Frazier published *The Negro Family in the United States* in 1939.³⁴ A strong influence on Myrdal and his primary resource in the aforementioned section of Myrdal's study, "The Negro Community as a Pathological Form of An American Community," Frazier's research sought to shift the emphasis from the inherent negative qualities of Negro society (residual characteristics carried over from

white people's false racial beliefs and their justification of caste. But it does not gainsay our assumption that *here, in America*, American culture is "highest" in the pragmatic sense that adherence to it is practical for any individual or group which is not strong enough to change it." Ibid., pp. 928-929.

³⁴ Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, with "Foreword" by Nathan Glazer (1966), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948/1939); Michael Omi and Howard Winant also make the connection between Myrdal and Frazier, and later, Daniel Patrick Moynihan in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 17, although their concern is predominantly that of ethnicity theory and assimilation.

the African continent) to the influence of wider American social institutions in deforming Negro social structures.³⁵ Noticeably, Myrdal incorporated this shift of emphasis into *An American Dilemma*, an issue brought into relief through the false dichotomy of nature versus culture.

To understand Frazier's trajectory, slavery, as a social institution, must prefigure the successive developments in his work. Without overly digressing, slavery functions as a point of origin for black American studies in any discipline. The Middle Passage, or the trans-Atlantic journey from the 'old world' of Africa to the 'new world' of the Americas is conceived as a unique entry into modernity.³⁶ In this temporal and spatial interim, traditions were lost or altered significantly; family ties and structures were destroyed or severely compromised, while new relations and languages between formerly disconnected or distant peoples (the enslaved as well as the slavers) were formed out of necessity and force. Slavery, albeit an undeniably repressive and brutal institution, should not be seen solely as a destructive force, eliminating all things previous from memory and from practice; rather, it was a creative institution both in the positive and negative senses of the term.

The Negro family, as something that often resulted from forced marriage and forced sexual practices between individual slaves and slaveholders, survived as a highly unstable entity. However, this instability also fostered an elevated sense of social conscientiousness among slave communities. For example, children were readily adopted

³⁵ It is important to note that neither Myrdal nor Frazier considers the African cultures from which Negro American slaves originated worthy of sociological investigation and do not postulate what 'positive' residues may remain from these cultures.

³⁶ See Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), especially Ch. 1: "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" for an assertion of a black counter-modernity. One must note that although Gilroy's project involves the trans-Atlantic movements of individuals and groups from slavery forward, his scope is limited to black North American and some black British happenings, neglecting other parts of the diaspora, most notably Central and South America and the Caribbean. Also neglected is the continent of Africa itself, which has the pernicious effect of obscuring variations in the colonising scheme by solely focusing on direct enslavement. This neglect contributes to his failure in proposing black atlanticist intellectual thought as a counter to the dominant European/Enlightenment conception of modernity, as he does not focus on the cross-fertilisation of thought between thinkers in different geographical and colonised areas but instead persists in linking black intellectuals back to their European counterparts or predecessors. Therefore, a 'black counter-modernity' remains unconvincing in this context.

or cared for by another 'family' if one or both parents died prematurely or were sold to another plantation. This instability or amorphous quality extended also to gender roles.

In comparison to the predominantly white slave-owning society, the Negro male lacked control over the daily life of the family in which he was involved due to the structure of slave society. In the meagre independent existence that a Negro family might eke out of the sale of independent crops, for example, women had an equivalent role to that of men in working in the fields or sustaining the independent economic welfare of the family. Because of the determination of a child's lineage through the mother in addition to the above differences between the slave-owning society and slave society, sociologists identified within the Negro community the 'abnormal' existence of a matriarchy in contrast to the 'normal' patriarchal structure of white society. Matriarchy, as a concern, did not emerge as an object of social scientific concern until after the formal emancipation of the slave population in 1863 when Negroes were expected to assimilate into the wider American population.

The proposition of a matriarchy was an extreme and unfounded one at best, as Negro women, whether more independent from men than white women, were still subjected to the mores of a white supremacist patriarchal society. However, this does not negate the agency of Negro women in the situations in which they were placed, and indeed their active involvement in the Negro community was as vital as that of the men in the struggle for emancipation. So, freedwomen were expected to relinquish the empowerment achieved in emancipatory struggles because of their gender.

Frazier concedes the desire of freedmen to assert superiority over 'their' women and children. The subordination of women *within* the newly liberated community, executes Chow's problematic concerning blackness and community formation. To the extent that he desires the submission of the black freedwoman, the position that the freedman wants to usurp is none other than that of the former white slaveholder. By characterising Negroes as subject to a matriarchal system, Frazier and other sociologists masked the contradictions inherent to the formation of the new community while

simultaneously casting Negro women as scapegoats for a host of issues such as the lack of employment available to Negro men, a rising crime rate among Negro youth, lack of sexual morality and the like.³⁷ Therefore, the success and the development of the Negro community becomes linked indelibly to the establishment of male authority.

Frazier's viewpoint remained the most influential sociological study on the Negro family into the 1960s, until Nathan Glazer, along with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, wrote *Beyond the Melting Pot* in 1963, becoming the new proponents for ethnicity theory. In fact, Glazer wrote the foreword to a revised edition of Frazier's *The Negro Family*.³⁸ Consequently, Frazier's work and others of its ilk not only influenced government initiatives in the decades to come but also the political stances of activists within the Negro community.³⁹

In the 1960s and 1970s sociological warnings against an entrenched matriarchy gave way to calls for the black man to claim his manhood. In other words, the emphasis shifted from the problematic black woman to the emasculated black man and his social and emotional needs. Under a programme of masculinist cultural nationalism, black America changed its demands for equal representation and incorporation into demands for community control, which would, in turn, be enabled by complete black economic independence. A new sociological figure, Moynihan, took over the mantle of the black family from Frazier with this reformulated emphasis on black manhood. In 1965,

³⁷ Urbanisation and industrialisation also figure prominently in Frazier's analysis as destabilising influences on the Negro family through increased mobility within urban centres, as well as the great migration of people from the rural South to the industrial North.

³⁸ Glazer states: "As I write this introduction, the *New York Times* reports that the President and his advisers now see the Negro family as a key element in their efforts to wipe out the gap between the social, educational, and economic positions of Negro and white. Conducting a conference on the Negro family in 1965, they will have no better text than Frazier; far from being supplanted, it has scarcely been supplemented. Its major framework remains solid and structures all our thinking on the Negro family." Glazer, "Foreword," p. vii.

³⁹ Notably, Martin Luther King, Jr. directly cites Frazier in one of his works, conceding to Frazier's characterisation of the black community as pathological and 'psychopathic' due to the assumption of matriarchy. Furthermore, King extends Frazier's analysis by linking matriarchy to interfamilial violence—a consequence of the frustration of Negro men. Thus, the pervasiveness of this kind of social science becomes explicit. See pp. 104-106 in *Chaos or Community?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969/1967).

Moynihan published “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action” under the sponsorship of the Office of Policy Planning and Research of the Department of Labor.

Paula Giddings explains that Moynihan’s report was commissioned under the Johnson Administration during a time of urban riots and ‘The War on Poverty’ stood as the principal agenda.⁴⁰ Johnson sought to alleviate the poverty among the black American population and needed research data on the problem areas in the black community so as to most efficiently and effectively allocate monetary and human resources. Moynihan, like Frazier, “pinpointed” the Negro family as the “source of deterioration of the fabric of Negro society” thus leading to a veritable economic failure of the Negro in the United States.

This particular sociological lineage—running through Frazier, Myrdal, Moynihan, and later, others, such as Glenn Loury, Thomas Sowell, and Cornel West—fails to elucidate a programme whereby a stable, economically secure Negro household can be realised. Furthermore, even if one were to take up the thesis of a black matriarchy and its consequences for the establishment of an authoritarian ‘Negro manhood,’ suggesting that Negro women should set aside their employment priorities and aspirations in order to make way for the men surely does not bring one any closer to an economically secure Negro family. This analysis also detracts attention from the societal structures that maintain the economic and cultural oppression of both Negro men and women.⁴¹ By taking the family as its primary focal point through which it addressed the racial,

⁴⁰ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), esp. Ch. XVIII, “Strong Women and Strutting Men: The Moynihan Report.” Giddings analysis of the Moynihan Report is well-structured, however, in her effort to combat Moynihan’s gender essentialism, she often retreats into her own version of the essential characteristics of black women, thus detracting significantly from her critique of Moynihan on this particular point. Giddings critique here is remarkably similar to one made by Michele Wallace in *Black Macho and The Myth of the Superwoman* (London: John Calder, 1978), pp. 30-31 and 109-117, although she does not reference her in this instance. As a consequence of this publication, Wallace was ostracised from black intellectual and academic circles. Although less formal and systematic in its outlook, and certainly not unproblematic, Wallace’s piece was outstanding in posing questions regarding black women’s roles in black movements and for highlighting the manner in which seemingly remote studies such as Moynihan’s attained the status of popular currency among blacks.

⁴¹ Others exemplify the Moynihan Report as an uneasy marriage between social science initiatives and that of the national government. See Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancy, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967).

economic, and cultural subordination of the Negro, this particular strain of sociological research has influenced the way in which the contemporary black community has been viewed. Furthermore, because the studies of Myrdal and Moynihan both were sponsored and driven by governmental and/or corporate objectives, this vein of study accrued more credentials and wielded more influence than others.

The call for traditional family values and the focus on a strong patriarchal figure was not solely confined to those sociologists focusing on the Negro/black family. From the late 1980s through to the new millennium, the pathology of the black family was portrayed as a contaminant infecting white society, particularly destabilising the middle classes and hence compromising the very warp and woof of American life. For example, the Clinton Administration, like that of Johnson, also took on board the task of attempting to alleviate the rising numbers of poverty-stricken individuals in American society. Again, through the work of social scientists, the focus was upon the nuclear family structure.

Judith Stacey, in referencing Moynihan, notes that the vanguard of this new family values campaign does not rely on religious sentiment for its force but ‘secular’ social science; therefore it is distinct from right-wing politics and elicits different effects.⁴² However, for these social science studies to gain popular currency, the depravity of non-traditional families in welfare or societal terms is translated swiftly into moral depravity.⁴³ The stigma of moral depravity is then *re*-translated into the need for counteractive social welfare measures.

The fear of the black community’s moral depravity and abhorrent social values captures the position from which right-wing political contenders and social scientists alike have approached ‘family values’ and the issue of racial contamination.⁴⁴ Here Stacey touches upon but does not quite draw out a crucial point of comparison between concern

⁴² Judith Stacey, “Scents, Scholars, and Stigma: The Revisionist Campaign for Family Values,” *Social Text* 40, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 51-75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

for black American or any other minority's family values and that of white conservative America. Concern for white family values involves the conservation of the race, the maintenance of the white population in the face of an onslaught of 'inferior' peoples; therefore it involves an increase in childbearing. However, the production of white children must take place in morally sound circumstances: the heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear family.⁴⁵ Proposed family values for black Americans, for example, have their basis in the necessity of reducing the urban populations of blacks, in particular, for fear of straining the welfare economy and threatening a perceived dwindling number of whites; therefore, childbearing activities should be curbed through the propagation of the legitimate nuclear family. Both scenarios demonstrate a sound preoccupation with the control of sexuality and the authority of a nuclear family, but with differing motivating factors.⁴⁶

C. *Cultural Nationalism(s) and the Black Family/Community*

The sexual lives of black people have preoccupied American life, stemming from the institutional culture of slavery. In addition to constituting a sub-discipline of American sociological inquiry, the black family has, in return, become one of the most guarded elements of black life. Particularly, a multitude of black nationalist groups, including MOVE, have adopted this position. This is somewhat predictable, as it was the familial

⁴⁵ Richard Dyer attributes this conflicting need to control white sexuality to a preoccupation with *whiteness*. Because an uncontrolled, eroticised sexuality is an image historically associated with the non-white primitive 'races,' white-identified societies must distance themselves from overt sexuality; however it is this repression of sexuality which compromises the propagation of the white race. He writes, "Our minds control our bodies and therefore both our sexual impulses and our forward planning of children. The very thing that makes us white endangers the reproduction of our whiteness." See Richard Dyer's *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Exhortations about the 'underclass' represent the latest manifestation of the intersection of poverty, 'deviant' sexuality, and race in America. This term, although lacking any identifiable constituency or subject, has been used with abandon to describe those citizens who are assumed to be beyond the pale with regard to transcending their condition. These people are supposedly without hope, ambition, morals, and proper culture, and therefore necessitate not economic restructuring, but moral conditioning and tutelage. Needless to say, this concept is highly racialised, and I have yet to come across an example that speaks of the white American poor in this way.

structure that was so vehemently assailed during the antebellum years and beyond. Yet the defence of the family in these movements often takes the form of reaffirming patriarchal authority, thus subjugating women once again within black familial units.⁴⁷

Barbara Ransby argues that Afrocentrism, in the most general application of the term, “represents an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the oppressive dominance of Eurocentrism in our lives.”⁴⁸ Ransby goes on to explain that Afrocentrism, in its attempt to re-centre the history, culture, and interests of people of African descent, is therefore viewed as a corrective to designated Eurocentric ways of thinking.⁴⁹ But the author is also cautious about attempts to elevate Afrocentric theories to heroic status, as they are not “prepackaged formula[s] for a meaningful black life.”⁵⁰ In other words, the centring of black interests on the agenda does not automatically solve the numerous dilemmas confronting black Americans.

Ransby argues that theoretical paradigms like Afrocentrism often fail to question the traditional familial structure propagated by Eurocentric bourgeois rationalism, thus conforming to its dictates with increased vigour. Drawing from the writings of contemporary Afrocentric scholars such as Molefi Asante, Haki Madhubuti, and Na'im Akbar she states:

In addition to the problematic formulation of race and ethnicity in Afrocentric writings of cultural and systematic nationalists, their analyses of gender and sexuality are equally disturbing. While most cultural nationalists of the 1990s acknowledge the value of “complementary,” if not fully equal relationships between men and women, there is very little attention given to the special oppression of women and certainly no advocacy of women's empowerment. [...] Unfortunately, the idea of men and women stepping outside

⁴⁷ The purpose here is not to reduce all black nationalist movements to either the element of the black family, nor the reassertion of male authority, but I would argue that the mainstream elements of their philosophies (which also tend to be the most accessible) coincide with this concentration on the nuclear family.

⁴⁸ Barbara Ransby, “Afrocentrism, Cultural Nationalism, and the Problem with Essentialist Definitions of Race, Gender, and Sexuality,” pp. 216-223 in Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower*, p. 218.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Ransby also differentiates between Africans and African Americans, as the former are often portrayed ahistorically and non-contemporaneous terms. She reminds us that “most Africans do not think of themselves simply as Africans” and therefore, the relation of African Americans to Africa and the relation of Africans to Africa is quite different and deserves a proper critical analysis.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 216.

of their traditional roles in relationship to one another is somehow seen as threatening to the African American community and family.⁵¹

Ransby's explanation of the importance of family in Afrocentric cultural nationalist theorisations resonates with the previous linkages between a 'matriarchal' familial structure and theses regarding a culture of poverty and the pathology of the black American community. When juxtaposed in this way, Afrocentricism expresses the same conservative tendencies as the 'Sociology of the Negro' sub-discipline. As a consequence of this convergence, some strains of Afrocentrism do not represent a significant departure from the Eurocentric ideals that they purport to destabilise and reject.

Jennifer Jordan also analyses cultural nationalist movements, but unlike Ransby, who centres her analysis upon broad Afrocentric theories that were rarely translated into a tangible movement, Jordan expands her discussion to encompass well-known groups such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam.⁵² She acknowledges that these groups expressed much more than a simple desire to create a black nation within a nation, as they often integrated religious elements, such as the unorthodox 'Islamic' practices of the Nation of Islam, or a particular revolutionary theory, such as the Black Panthers' employment of Marxism(s). Broadly, however, she identifies two tendencies in black American cultural nationalisms. The first concerns the preservation or conservation of a culture viewed as distinctly black American, while the second seeks to recreate or retrieve culture from specific renderings of 'Africa.' The philosophy of MOVE, for example, constitutes a combination of the two tendencies, as the group aimed to re-create a stronger black family unique to the American experience, while drawing upon an African imaginary, and channelled these into a religious doctrine. For example, in *25 Years on the*

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 219-220. Ransby also notes the "virulent homophobia" characterising many of the Afrocentric theories, again reinforcing the dominance of a traditional, nuclear, family. However, this approach differs from other scholars, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, who in his masterpiece *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935) reconfigured the economics of the Civil War era in the United States by re-centring the importance of black American labour to the country's process of industrialisation. Du Bois' study highlighted a neglected element in Civil War history, and thus served as a corrective to an overly romanticised notion of the Civil War, which emphasised the moral righteousness of white Americans in dismantling the institution of slavery.

⁵² Jennifer Jordan, "Cultural Nationalism in the 1960s: Politics and Poetry," pp. 29-60 in Adolph Reed, Jr., ed., *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

MOVE the group included a section titled 'Living as a Revolutionary Family' in its list of beliefs and practices. "All committed *MOVE* members take the last name "Africa" [...] to show that we are a family, a unified body moving in one direction. [...] While we do not heed the system's legal institution of marriage, we do adhere to the natural law that requires one male and one female to made and produce new life. We are monogamous."⁵³ Thus, from afar, the structure of the group appeared to counter the ideal of the nuclear family through its communal living pattern, but in practice, this motivation was in full force through mandates for sexual control, monogamy, and heterosexuality.

Jordan also stresses the importance of class in the resurgence of cultural nationalisms. Although periods of cultural nationalism were not all initiated as part of a greater bourgeois project, it was often this class that seized hold of the leadership reigns, thus re-channelling the energies of various black constituencies. For example, Adolph Reed, Jr. emphasises the Black Power movement as case and point. He stresses that the bourgeoisie easily appropriated Black Power's emphasis on 'community control' in order to bolster black capitalism.⁵⁴ Additionally, Alex Willingham notes that although 'black militant' posturing "has shifted to an ostensible antibourgeois stance[,] it has come only to the social welfarism already monopolized by the black liberals."⁵⁵ Although Black Power radicals expressed a desire to remove themselves from the 'black community's' elite leadership stratum, it was precisely this group to whom the radicals turned to negotiate and 'manage' their place on the political scene. Thus, Jordan states: "Cultural nationalism became that middle place between violence and acquiescence, a place where one could escape death and prison but still shout out one's defiance."⁵⁶

⁵³ *MOVE, 25 Years on the MOVE* (Philadelphia, 1996), p. 70.

⁵⁴ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution' and the Reconstitution of Domination," pp. 61-95 in Reed, *Race, Politics, and Culture*, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁵ Willingham, "Ideology and Politics: Their Status in Afro-American Social Theory," pp. 13-27 in Reed, *Race, Politics, and Culture*, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Jordan, "Cultural Nationalism in the 1960s," p. 38.

D. *The Dominance of Community in Black American Politics*

As an integral component to improving the lives of the black population in the United States, the subject of the black family is not limited to formal social scientific inquiry or black cultural nationalism. As mentioned in Judith Stacey's exposition, 'family values' campaigns, particularly from the Reagan era forward, have assumed a principal role in formal politics as well. However, the conception of the black family as black community also determines the manner in which black Americans are permitted to enter the formal political arena. To appropriate Rey Chow's terminology, the black community influenced the manner in which blacks are permitted to gain *admittance* to politics. In contrast to idealised understandings of community, which presume its inherently democratic nature, the employment of community in black American politics exemplifies, ironically, a rejection and erosion of democratic principles. This notion of community proclaims an adequate process of discussion, confrontation and conciliation over issues relevant to its constituent members, either leading to the selection of leaders who embody and will fight for the leading interests of this group, or finding another means of speaking with a unified 'voice.' A multicultural or pluralist model of democratic participation paradigmatically represents this communitarian ideal. However, this is not the case with the black American community. The assertion here is that the black community functions in a manner similar to a colony with regard to political participation and the 'propping up' of elite leaders.⁵⁷ In place of leaders emerging from within the black population in terms of having worked within and around people concerning issues relevant to these

⁵⁷ However, one should be wary of applying the colonial or neo-colonial analogy in general. It is applied here sparingly to highlight the problematic of black leadership and the black community. Nikhil Pal Singh also stresses the compatibility of the analogy of 'the black ghetto as colony' and conservative discourses of 'underclass' segregation and the like. He writes: "[...] I would not necessarily want to defend the internal colony thesis as an answer to the contemporary incarnation of America's racial "crisis." Indeed, if there is a flaw in the notion that the ghetto is an internal colony, it is that its prospects for "liberation" and "self-determination" seem slim, if not already co-opted by New Right discourses about "enterprise zones," tight discipline, and low-wage austerity as the preconditions for urban aid and the promise of future development." Singh, "Towards an Effective Antiracism," pp. 42-43.

constituencies, the leaders recognised as wielding authority in formal politics are typically individuals who have been externally imposed upon this fictive black community. Influential members of the Democratic Party, for instance, or the executive branch of government, sanction these leaders thus facilitating a brokerage-style of politics reminiscent of bygone times.

During the Jim Crow era of overt legal segregation, it was politically expedient to overlook divisions and competing interests within 'the black community,' as there were overtly oppressive forces violently arresting the everyday lives of black Americans. But the aftermath of the civil rights era revealed diverging interests and needs, yet this myth of a unified black community persisted; as such, it has continued to undermine a full, free, and equal practice of democratic participation in American politics. Therefore, in place of shifting an equal burden of analysis onto the activities impinging upon or improving political participation within the black population itself, the focus has remained squarely upon macro-political racial politics, and more often than not, this solely encompasses the dynamic between white and black Americans. Consequently, black Americans are condensed into a unitary subject, and power differentials within the black population have been minimised in place of a facile discourse of white dominance over blacks. Reed formulates this situation as such: "The representation of the black community as a collective subject neatly concealed the system of hierarchy which mediated the relation of the 'leaders' and the 'led.'" ⁵⁸

Reed continues by arguing that a select group of black individuals were enabled to serve as administrators or managers of black Americans during the waning years of the Civil Rights Movement. "This elite stratum was comprised mainly of low-level state functionaries, merchants and "professionals" servicing black markets, and the clergy."⁵⁹ This stratum wielded a certain degree of power in political circles by serving as

⁵⁸ Reed, "The 'Black Revolution'," p. 64. Reed later considers that "the social category 'leaders' " seemed applicable only to the black community. "No 'white leaders' were assumed to represent a singular white population, but certain blacks were declared opinion-makers and carriers of the interests of an anonymous black population." pp. 67-68.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

middlemen and facilitating “the adjustment of the black population to social policy imperatives formulated outside the black community.”⁶⁰ Thus this group socially managed a top-down distribution of government mandates without demanding and accomplishing the reverse.

Incitements to black community serve to mystify the process of assessing political accountability and credibility. The ability to lead the black community is premised upon claims to black authenticity or ‘blackness.’ Therefore, anyone is authorised to speak for the faceless masses, but those possessing the greatest monetary resources, as well as clout with a ruling political elite, are better enabled to put themselves forward as the best representatives of the black population. Although their policy platforms may be at odds with the diverging interests of the population they purport to lead, the quality of blackness is available to deflect criticism and prevent a substantive investigation into the structural as well as cultural differences and interests within the black population.

V. Summary

An inquiry into ‘blackness’ and its importance as an element in black American politics, both formal and informal, is necessary to understanding the structured way in which black Americans are permitted to enter the formal political arena. Partly, this focus on blackness is the result of numerous social scientific studies and their questionable linkages to public policy forums and government mandates. This chapter has sought to address the sub-discipline of the Sociology of the Negro and the persistence of its discourse throughout the decades. From the culture-of-poverty thesis to the ubiquitous presence of ‘underclass’ terminology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this manner of social study remains resolutely wedded to a fictive, unified black community, supported by its building block, the black family.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Class also undercuts a great deal of the subject matter introduced in this chapter. Embourgeoisement significantly inflects the ideal of the nuclear family to which black Americans ought to aspire, and serves as the predominant model in sociological doctrines such as those produced by Myrdal, Frazier, and Moynihan. Attaining this status is also on par with achieving the 'American Dream,' and the values associated with it—respectability, a restrained and controllable sexuality, as well as a puritanical work ethic—are precisely those goals set forth for the achievement of a non-pathological Negro family and black community. Conversely, some forms of cultural nationalism and popular consumer culture regard embourgeoisement as an impediment to authentic blackness or an accelerated ascendancy into the realms of whiteness; this perspective pertains to those who identify as black as well as those who do not. In other words, it is associated with conformism and accepting the standards of a white-controlled, racist society. However, often those who rage against the machine in rhetoric are also those who often advocate for black community programmes which propagate the same bourgeois values, only with black people doing the talking and managing. This charge has been levied against the Nation of Islam, for example, as well as the muddled rhetoric of the Black Power movement.

The essentialist/anti-essentialist debate introduced at the opening of this chapter contributes to the destabilisation of a homogenised and simplistic understanding of black community and black American culture. However, as Hortense Spillers argues, the rejection of the essentialising strategy is not adequate to understanding the complicated character of race and racism.⁶¹ Therefore, one must engage in a historically situated analysis of the subject at hand.

The theoretical discussions elucidated above are a necessary component in understanding MOVE. When analysing the print news media, the importance of discourses such as blackness, and the black community and linkages to 'pathology' will resurface. Having provided the theoretical groundwork for the remainder of this study, the

⁶¹ See pp. 25-26.

next chapter will present a shift of emphasis in order to focus on the predominance of liberalism in American political thought and practice and its consequences for black Americans and democratic participation. From here, we will move on to consider the significance of the Age of Reagan and a history of racial politics in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This movement from national to localised politics presents an opportunity to consider MOVE in the context of the prevailing political currents of its era, and the manner in which MOVE, as a cultural nationalist group, responded to as well as became a literal and figurative casualty of these influences.

CHAPTER 3: BLACK AMERICAN POLITICS IN THE AGE OF REAGAN

Historical Backdrop

Liberalism conveniently inverts the logic of rights and obligations with regard to African Americans. The rights of African Americans have never been presumed to be natural. They have always been contractual; that is, at every point in U.S. history, African Americans have never had the luxury of presuming that our essential humanity guaranteed, ipso facto, rights naturally available to a privileged class of Euro-American males.

—Melanie Njeri Jackson, “The Liberal State: What Retreat?”

...acquiescence and complicity are no less central components of the narrative of African-American political life than are resistance and sabotage.

—Adolph L. Reed, Jr., “Mythologies of Cultural Politics and the Discrete Charm of the Black Petite Bourgeoisie”

...when blacks entered city hall to take the spoils of victory, they found that whites had carted away the wealth of the metropolis to suburban communities beyond central-city jurisdiction. The black-ruled fragments were little more than bankrupt relics of past greatness.

—Jon C. Teaford *The Twentieth-Century American City: Problem, Promise, and Reality* as quoted by Jeffrey Adler

I. Introduction

To bring into relief the localised history of MOVE, it is imperative to address the national political scene as well as the prevailing trends of the era. The time period under consideration spans the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, and as such, the transformation of black American formal politics under this time frame will be at stake. At the national level, the overall status of blacks was in a state of crisis under the presidential leadership of Ronald Reagan. Many of the gains acquired by the black population during the 1960s and 1970s were rescinded as a consequence of Reaganite policies, thus undermining the continuing legacy of the Civil Rights Movement.

However, the role of black politicians and policy intellectuals, liberal and conservative, must be taken into account with regard to the formation of Reagan’s detrimental policies; it was primarily black American neo-conservative and neo-accommodationist policy intellectuals who helped to buoy the Reagan Administration

through the support and creation of national policies designed to rescind federal and state funding from the country's most needy and desperate citizens. From here, we will consider neo-conservative ideology and the way in which it made its way into or adapted itself to the most liberal as well as nationalist strains of black American politics. For black Americans and many others, the only thing to trickle down from Reagan's overhaul of the nation's economic structure was the Republican ideological platform.

The same period within which Reagan rose to power and formulated his attack on the national civil rights agenda corresponded with the ascendance of black Americans within municipal governments. While representing an important political shift, these men and women faced momentous obstacles in their attempt to merely lead their respective cities as mayors and city council members, let alone to press for advances for black communities. Due to Reagan's unfettered assault on liberalism itself and the liberal state policies upheld and created by his predecessors, these heads of city executive and legislative branches faced a dearth of federal funding for the most basic of municipal services from waste removal to road maintenance, thus complicating the creation and implementation of civil rights initiatives.

Moving from the overall impact of the Reagan Administration on the black population to its correlation with a new crop of black American municipal leaders in the nation's urban centres, we will then consider the relevance of the national tableau for Philadelphian politics. This chapter will provide the foundation for an increased understanding of MOVE's impact on Philadelphia and subsequently, the politics possibly motivating or influencing the city administration's response to the group's re-emergence.

II. Liberal Foundations

In appreciating the political and economic issues characterising the Reagan Administration for the black population, we must first recognise the recent history of

black intellectual thought regarding formal or electoral politics. Prior to and beyond the most acknowledged era of civil rights, termed the Second Reconstruction, the majority of black American political strategists have been principally concerned with the acquisition of equal civil rights in addition to the implementation of redistributive economic policies. The civil rights initiatives of the 1960s, theoretically embodying much more than 'civil' rights, stressed human rights in their ideal form. However, the impetus of the movement was dedicated towards the acquisition of electoral rights and the encouragement of equitable electoral participation. While accepting the importance of the Civil Rights Movement to overhaul the American political structure, we must question why the black population has attained such limited advances. While many would proclaim the role of black nationalism and separatism in detracting from the movement's momentum, in addition to the actions of various political and leadership factions, the argument here is that the promise of the Civil Rights Movement is undermined by a thread in its theoretical and philosophical foundation. This thread is the dominance of liberalism in American political thought and practice and its subsequent transference into the civil rights agenda of the 1960s and beyond.¹

The era of post-civil rights² has been marked with considerable malaise and confusion with regard to the persistent inadequacies of the American political system and the general state of inequality and desperation characterising the lives of many black Americans. These conditions highlight the unfulfilled promise of the Civil Rights Movement and have caused many either to retreat from political participation or to remain committed to liberal Democratic politics regardless of its platform. As stated previously, for those clinging to the liberal agenda, this has spawned a new generation of politicians

¹ Alex Willingham states: "Because the Civil Rights movement compromised too drastically on the rearrangement of American institutions of order, it failed to modify the real relationship of black people to them, and the black elite functions today in a situation in which the prior subordination of this constituency is a given." See his "Ideology and Politics: Their Status in Afro-American Social Theory," pp. 13-27 in Adolph Reed, Jr., ed., *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 17.

² This is a dubious designation, as the United States had not yet gone beyond civil rights in terms of accomplishing the full implementation of such ideals. Its usage here is a temporal one to mark the importance of the civil rights movement.

dedicated to self-promotion at the cost of others. This would not be so lamentable if not for the tidal wave of black support that carried these politicians into office in the first instance, but allegiances and accountability are increasingly put aside after election day has passed. But the temptation to lay blame solely on the shoulders of black leaders must not deter an examination of the political structure undermining the attainment of civil and human rights. In other words, black American politicians, theorists, and activists often look to the core of American constitutionalism—liberalism—for guidance in alleviating the deteriorating conditions in black communities without recognising that liberalism often provides the rationale for the continuation of these conditions. This creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates oppression in the name of upholding or protecting the promise of liberalism.

A. *Liberal Strategies of Exclusion*

The principal problem with black Americans' adherence to liberalism is that it is assumed to provide for the most marginalised and oppressed citizens. According to Uday Mehta, liberalism is passed off as the most inclusionary of political theories.³ He writes,

In its theoretical vision, liberalism, from the seventeenth century to the present, has prided itself on its universality and politically inclusionary character. And yet, when it is viewed as a historical phenomena, again extending from the seventeenth century, the period of liberal history is unmistakably marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and "types" of people. The universality of freedom and derivative political institutions identified with the provenance of liberalism is denied in the protracted history with which liberalism is similarly linked.⁴

In this passage the initial thrust of Mehta's argument is clear: the realities of liberal history do not reflect the enlightened posture of liberal theory. But tension exists between liberal theory and liberal history as such; that is liberalism, as an abstract philosophical ideal, and liberalism in its practical application to political systems and structures, cannot

³ The discussion of liberalism in this section attained its principal motivation from an essay of the same name titled "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion" by Uday S. Mehta, *Politics & Society*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1990): 427-454.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

be conflated. The author attends to this tension throughout the essay and states, “Despite the enormous contrariety between the profession of political universality and the history of political exclusion, the latter may in fact elaborate the truth and ambivalence of the former.”⁵ Although Mehta’s geographical reference is nineteenth-century India and its British colonial history, his argument and framework is applicable to the United States.

Mehta gestures broadly in the introduction of the essay to dispel readings of his argument that would suggest that liberalism is “merely a ruse” or a ploy to mask oppressive practices of marginalisation and disenfranchisement. Nor does he obscure advances resulting from liberalism. Rather, he posits that the foundation of liberalism is compromised, one illuminated more so when arguing for the political rights of the dispossessed in colonial societies. Following Mehta, liberalism is inflected with anthropological assumptions about human nature and the capacities an individual ought to possess in order to be considered a full human being. In other words the right of political participation is indelibly linked to one’s cultural and psychological background; humanity is not an automatic condition, nor is it universal under liberalism. Herein lies Mehta’s usage of the term ‘strategies’ in the essay’s title. He writes,

Liberal exclusion is neither a theoretically dictated necessity nor merely an occasional happenstance of purely contingent significance. The distinction between universal capacities and the conditions for their actualization points to a space in which the liberal theorist can, as it were, raise the ante for political inclusion.⁶

The deployment of ‘strategies’ is an important element in the author’s argument as the history of exclusion under the helm of liberalism is not merely happenstance, as in an aberration due to poor application or judgment. Nor is exclusion the result of a specific dictum in liberal theory, as again, it is part and parcel of liberalism’s understated cultural and psychological conditions. Therefore, a *strategy* negates both accident and general liberal policy; instead it is a term that allows for historical circumstances such that inclusiveness is dependent upon the mores of the time period in question. The assertion of historical specificity is contrary to generalised, transcendent notions of liberalism.

⁵ Ibid., p. 428.

⁶ Ibid., p. 430.

The remainder of Mehta's piece is dedicated towards illuminating the numerous strategies employed to effect exclusion on certain populations. Through his primary reading of Locke's *Second Treatise of Government, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Thoughts Concerning Education* as well as Locke's seventeenth-century critical contemporaries and nineteenth-century successors, Mehta deduces that "political inclusion is contingent upon a *qualified* capacity to reason."⁷ 'Reason' is not a given but dictated and measured, which for Locke was dependent on one's breeding and display of social conventions learned through both formal tutelage and education through socialisation. Thus one must be able, as well as *enabled*, to work with or 'negotiate' certain social standards in order to be 'reasonable' and available for political inclusion.⁸

Crossing to the other side of the Atlantic, the constitutional republicanism representative of the United States' government, while not equivalent to liberalism, is certainly constituted by principles of philosophical liberalism that arose from Western Enlightenment philosophies. The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah notes that liberalism captures both political institutions as well as a body of ideas or philosophy that motivates the creation of those institutions.⁹ He asserts that the Declaration of Independence of 1776 is the most representative document in American politics that subscribes to and reflects the liberal philosophy. In recalling the significance of the French 'rallying cry' for liberty, equality, and fraternity, Appiah remarks:

Liberty and equality are there in the American Declaration, on its face, so to speak. But fraternity is there too, for fraternity is what binds together the people, the people who may alter or abolish forms of government. The Declaration takes for granted that there is already an American people to exercise this right. The American Revolution assumes, with an assurance that is surely bold in a multireligious immigrant country in the New World, that there is a nation here that can construct an American government. This is

⁷ Ibid., p. 436, my emphasis.

⁸ From this point, Mehta continues by considering India in the nineteenth century and the manner in which strategies of liberal exclusion were employed in the British colonial context. While this part of Mehta's argument will not be rehearsed here, it is important to state that he acknowledges certain modifications were made to Locke's seventeenth century rendering of liberalism by John Stuart Mill, Bentham, and others in order to justify the subjugation of Indian peoples. Whether or not one accepts his move from 17th to 19th-century liberalism, it is useful in positing the non-transcendent nature of liberalism or liberalism's adaptability to political exigencies.

⁹ Appiah, "Liberalism, Individuality, and Identity," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2001): 305-332.

particularly striking since there were important assumptions made by the country's founders about who the we of "we, the people" were.¹⁰

Appiah lists the people excluded from the ideals presented here, namely certain religious groups, slaves, indigenous peoples, and women. Therefore, the Declaration of Independence embraced the principles of liberalism but sought to apply them discriminately. Appiah also remarks that blacks (men) as viable citizens were only appended constitutionally in the mid-nineteenth century and women in the twentieth century. So, from the moment of the nation's birth, some could claim the country as their own where others were consumed by the nation as its property for years to come.

Consequently, American liberalism, embedded as it is in a very specific Western philosophical tradition and maintaining its own 'strategies of exclusion,' should not be expected to speak to and for blacks in the ensuing decades. Here is a philosophical doctrine that permitted the enslavement of millions of human beings through the mobilisation of a myriad of rational, reasonable, and empirically sound theoretical and scientific models regarding the inherent inequality between different human beings, and this occurred only after the pernicious theories of sub-humanity and bestiality had been set aside or reformed. Even with attendant goals to provide for the general public, one of the primary responsibilities supporting liberalism is the protection of the free market and private property. Thus, the free market trumps any notion of individual rights, particularly for those who were once considered property. A philosophical tradition that can 'make sense' out of human enslavement cannot be entrusted fully with the provision of human rights for the disenfranchised. The argument is not that black American political strategists have erred in putting stock in liberalism to provide for America's black population, but rather, the error occurs in not recognising both the promise and the downfalls of liberalism, by supporting it blindly.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 308. While Appiah's argument is useful for the point made here, I do not concur with his rendering of liberalism as optimal for living a 'human life of dignity,' which constitutes his defence of liberalism. While his argument is not refuted outright, his analysis remains in the abstract in terms of illuminating the pitfalls of liberalism in the American context.

**B. *The Dominance of Liberalism in Black American Politics
in the Reagan Era***

Having first provided an interpretation of Mehta's argument as well as a general sense of the place of liberalism in the United States, we will now return to a consideration of the prevalence of liberal ideology in black American politics. As stated at the outset of this chapter, advances have not been made in black Americans' political and everyday lives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to the extent prophesied by the Civil Rights Movement. The civil rights initiatives of the 1960s illuminated the greatest successes as well as the most striking failures of black American history. However, the moment presented to us in the form of the Civil Rights Movement has neither been transformed nor transcended in a manner beneficial for the black American population generally. It has led either to increased pandering to the white-dominated political structure by black political elites, or the retreat of such leaders into a pattern of self-promotion and self-aggrandisement. These political elites are ill-equipped to tackle the deep political and economic inadequacies facing the black American population. This dearth of transformative potential leads us into a contemplation of black American politics in the Age of Reagan.

Firstly, we must ask why liberalism, as the dominating political ideology (whether one may be Democratic or Republican) has maintained itself as the philosophy of choice for those engaged in black American politics. What is there to gain from a mode of thinking that has strategised the exclusivity described previously? Returning to Mehta's argument, he reminds us that the failings of liberalism are often conceived as faulty policy formation or inadequate leadership, but the very integrity of liberalism is never questioned. Melanie Njeri Jackson attunes this discussion specifically for the black American context. She suggests:

The intransigence of the social ills that plague the African American community have often been attributed to liberalism (by self-proclaimed liberals and conservatives), narrowly interpreted as specific kinds of public policies. Liberalism, scholars insist, is the essential underpinning of the U.S. political economy. That tradition is characterized by endorsement of democratic values and the free market ethos of capitalist economics. The

many violations of the assumptions and assertions of the political and economic norms of the liberal tradition have, in recent times, been attributed to a retreat from liberalism.¹¹

This quote returns us to Mehta's distinction between liberalism conceptualised as political institutions and liberalism as philosophical thought. For Jackson, "the dilemma of black politics is not simply that problems have not been solved but that solutions are informed by frameworks responsible for the genesis of problems."¹² Therefore, the assumption that the system can be improved is a limited solution to the problems plaguing Americans in general.

However, this is precisely the kind of activism witnessed in the late 1960s and 1970s. The strata of formal black electoral politicians attempted to secure federal funding for social welfare programmes through explicitly race-based policy formation. The most fruitful period of this kind of politics occurred during the Lyndon B. Johnson Administration and his Great Society programmes in addition to his noted 'War on Poverty.'¹³ While limited in scope, these programmes ensured the distribution of federal monies into faltering areas of the economy, which in turn supported burgeoning black urban populations in addition to others. Although Johnson's initiatives began to wane at the end of his office, these programmes retained the promise of liberal inclusivity and a concern for the nation's dispossessed. However, the Johnson Administration could not ignore the changing national economy from one upheld primarily by industrial

¹¹ Jackson, "The Liberal State: What Retreat? An Examination of Philosophical Ambivalence and Continuity in Perspectives and Treatment of African Americans in the U.S. Political System," pp. 7-24 in Marilyn E. Lashley and Melanie Njeri Jackson, eds., *African Americans and the New Policy Consensus: Retreat of the Liberal State?* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 9. Jackson's argument posits that the liberal state has not retreated from its commitment to social welfare policies during the Reagan Administration specifically. She argues that these policies were indeed reduced during this period, but that this does not constitute a retreat from liberalism, but rather, it is part and parcel of American liberalism itself. In this, her argument is comparable to Mehta's.

¹² Ibid., p. 8. Jackson also posits that the unwillingness to look beyond the superficial guarantees of liberalism stifles recognition of the importance of individuality or the 'Cartesian subject' in American political thought. This 'disposition' places greater onus on individual responsibility than the significance of social structures and political institutions and their bearing on the lives of citizens.

¹³ Johnson's focus on the 'Great Society' was not simply the consequence of the administration's sense of internal justice and equity. The President felt the need to present America as a beacon of democracy to the rest of the world.

manufacturing to one increasingly reliant on a managerial and service economy, an economy thus dependent on educated workers.

After the Nixon and Carter Administrations, Reagan's rise to power swiftly put an end to liberal welfare policies and systematically dismantled the support system behind many federal programmes.¹⁴ Significantly, it was not only the funding for these programmes that were eliminated, but also the bureaucratic structures supporting and administering these programmes. The Reagan Administration combated the image of big government by eliminating 'superfluous' programmes, which tapped into federal funds. Instead these funds were shifted into an increase in defence-spending and tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. Supposedly the funds 'saved' by big business and wealthy citizens would trickle down to more needy American citizens.

Under the Reagan Administration, these social welfare programmes were not only shut down and shut out, but they also became the scapegoats for the nation's economic problems. The supposed beneficiaries of these programmes became the available whipping boys and girls for the unemployed, unskilled, and struggling leagues of white Americans also bearing the brunt of the economic downturn. Jackson ironically remarks that liberalism actually aided this scapegoating tendency "because growth has not proven to be a panacea."¹⁵ Thus, as the market had not provided a cure-all for the ailments of American life along with the provision of formal civil rights for black Americans, the persistence of these ailments led to the promotion of ideas regarding the inadequacies of black American culture, deeming it deficient or unsuitable for the American way of life, a subject discussed in detail in *Chapter 2*.

¹⁴ Katherine Tate notes that Nixon was surprisingly supportive of enacting affirmative action legislation in some ways. He created and supported the Philadelphia Plan, which sought to disperse a proportion of federal funds to minority federal contractors. See Tate's *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1993), p. 167. However, Nixon was also a strong advocate of 'Blackonomics' or the importation of explicit capitalist or laissez-faire economic strategies into black communities in place of economic restructuring.

¹⁵ Jackson, "The Liberal State," in Lashley and Jackson, *African Americans and the New Policy Consensus*, p. 15.

The 'New Darwinism,' as it is termed by economist Rhonda Williams, developed in the United States with a renewed interest in the persistence of poverty in a capitalist society. This rejuvenated line of thinking posits that the "possession of the right cultural attributes is sufficient to guarantee material success."¹⁶ Therefore, if one possesses the proper cultural training and socialisation, then one will be more successful in surviving the free market. This marks a departure from theorising the persistence of racism as an element in the causation of poverty and places a renewed focus on techniques of social engineering. While such theses deducing a 'culture of poverty' from a poverty of culture certainly had their antecedents in American intellectual thought long before the Reagan Administration appropriated them (as discussed in *Chapter 2*), this particular strain of Social Darwinism concerning the poverty of black American culture partly emerged through the most unlikely of sources: black Americans themselves.

Although Reagan ushered in a period of intense anti-intellectualism characterised by attacks on institutions of higher education, the media, and intellectual elites in the northeastern corner of the country, his administration did not shy away from a group of intellectuals who could compose questionably coherent, but nonetheless persuasive economic policies. The Reagan Administration thus maintained a coterie of black intellectuals to obscure the severity of the policy initiatives taken in the 1980s. A number of these policy intellectuals in the Reagan era were black American neo-conservatives who subscribed to the President's fiscal austerity. The racial identities of these policy intellectuals deflected accusations of racism within the Reagan Administration. Additionally, they assisted in the dispersion of this ideology throughout black America from formal to grassroots politics.

¹⁶ Rhonda M. Williams, "Culture as Human Capital: Methodological and Policy Implications," pp. 35- 49 in Lashley and Jackson, *African Americans and the New Policy Consensus*, p. 35. Williams' argument is appreciated here, because although she approaches this topic from the discipline of economics, she does not reject the importance of identity or cultural politics, but instead considers them as material to the construction of a neo-conservative agenda.

Complimenting Williams' argument is an article by Hayes, which details the programmatic strategy by some of these black neo-conservatives leading into and during the Reagan years.¹⁷ Hayes suggests:

During the past decade, the issue of economic self-determination that Du Bois raised – also advocated by the conservative Booker T. Washington before him – once again captured the attention of African Americans of differing political and ideological persuasions. The resurgence of this issue resulted from the political administration of Ronald Reagan (and later George Bush) whose conservative rhetoric and policies generally were considered hostile to African Americans and to growing numbers of impoverished citizens. In the context of this critical situation, many African Americans discussed the necessity of the self-help strategy.¹⁸

Due to Reagan's elimination of federal funds towards social welfare programmes, Hayes asserts that many black American leaders turned inwards for solutions within the black community itself. The 'self-help' strategy entailed a reaffirmation of black capitalism, one with adherents from Booker T. Washington, mentioned by Hayes, to the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam, albeit with differing motivations. He also notes that unlike Johnson and Nixon, Reagan had snubbed the traditional black leadership accustomed to 'brokering' deals with the nation's executive branch.¹⁹ They were denied access to the negotiating table and required a new perspective from which to 'lead' the black community.

Therefore, an impotent liberal leadership stratum combined with Reagan's policy conservatives served to reinforce the administration's ideals of laissez-faire capitalism: The displaced leaders advocated self-help or economic self-determination in order to cope with the administration's indifference and to maintain their leadership position, while black neo-conservatives dismantled social welfare policies under the pretence that such policies were inherently ineffectual.

Both Williams and Hayes credit political economists Thomas Sowell and Glenn Loury with influencing and refining the Reagan agenda, and rendering it palatable with segments of the black community. Sowell, from Stanford University's Hoover Institution,

¹⁷ Floyd W. Hayes III, "Government Retreat, the Dispossessed, and Politics of African American Self-Reliant Development in the Age of Reaganism," pp. 99-119 in Lashley and Jackson, *African Americans and the New Policy Consensus*.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

and Loury, of Harvard, became the voices with which to contend regarding the effect of Reagan's policies on black Americans. Their presence lent credibility to the administration and a moral imperative for all black Americans to 'help themselves.'²⁰ To some, Loury and Sowell's prescription may have made sense in light of the failure of the liberal welfare state to improve the lives of black Americans.

Hayes recognises that although Johnson's Great Society programmes assisted some blacks in achieving an improved degree of social and economic security, it was not a complete solution and may have further polarised the black population in terms of class. While aiding blacks in professional and managerial positions, those reliant on blue-collar jobs were not as successful in progressing forward. Again, due to the changing nature of the economy from a heavily industrialised one, to one geared towards information technology and managerial services, labour positions, high-skilled or otherwise, were leaching out of the country to overseas locations. Therefore, unless one had the education to enter a managerial or technological field, the options were limited although federal funds were available. As a consequence, those with the requisite education were able to advance, while those in the working class receded further into poverty.

The call for economic self-determination for blacks fostered a congratulatory bourgeois sensibility, as middle-class black Americans could feel proud of having escaped the 'underclass' and the urban ghetto, while also feeling charitable in taking on the responsibility of 'raising up' those beneath them through economic assistance as well as through the inculcation of the proper moral and cultural values. Hayes adds,

Attendant to conservative African American policy intellectuals' self-help thesis is the issue of African American charitable activities to assist the poor. Loury and his conservative colleagues suggested that if the African American middle class paid less attention to political advocacy and lobbying the federal government for handouts for the poor and, alternatively, provided more of their own economic resources to the poor, the

²⁰ Although affirmative action policies preceding the Reagan Administration may well have been responsible for their ascendance in their respective institutions, neo-conservatives such as Loury and Sowell never acknowledge this possibility. In other words, black neo-conservatives rarely narrate fully the circumstances contributing to their own success or those circumstances indeed separating them from those less successful. I would also add that one only convincingly espouses self-help from a position of relative comfort and security in this particular context, thus necessitating an inquiry into the biography of its advocates.

life chances of the urban African American dispossessed would be substantially improved.²¹

Hayes argues that this is a limited strategy, as blacks have traditionally given back to their communities, but these funds and services are insufficient. In other words, impoverished people need jobs, a consistent means of providing for themselves and their families without relying upon the instability of church or private donations. Furthermore, Reaganomics disabled many middle-income Americans from contributing any surplus funds to charity due to the overall effect of the administration's deletion of social welfare programmes. Therefore, the economic self-determination proposed by black Reaganites and adopted by the dominant black leadership stratum, liberal or conservative, was not only distasteful in its assumption of bourgeois self-righteousness and propriety, but it was also inadequate in coping with the complexities of the changing economy and class structure.

As a consequence of the strategy of economic self-determination in the black community, many leaders turned away from the national political scene and inwards towards themselves and private enterprises. This transition channelled needed energy away from the Reagan Administration and political advocacy in general, thus permitting the Republicans to run roughshod over common black Americans without facing an adequately prepared and sufficiently involved opposition from blacks or from the liberal Left in general.

The role of black Reaganites was primarily one of consultants, bureaucratic deconstructionists, and representative black faces for a government that was damagingly disinterested in the lives and welfare of black Americans. Rarely did such intellectuals occupy a constructive role in the administration with a power all their own. A certain degree of authority and credibility existed for these intellectuals, yet these qualities were inextricably dependent upon the Reagan agenda in its entirety.

²¹ Ibid., p. 107.

*D. The Reagan Administration's Defence
of a 'White' America*

Hayes notes that the traditional black leadership and the new generation of black conservatives were both advocating regressive strategies, or ones negatively oriented towards the past. This regressive tendency also characterises the transformation in white American politics.²² While black American politics in the Reagan era has been the focus thus far, it is crucial to take account of the political bloc formed in opposition to a liberal welfare state.

The complexity of the Reagan era arose from not only the transformation in black American politics but in white American politics as well. The ascendancy of black conservatives coupled with the decline of the welfare state did not occur in a vacuum. The theories and policy directives largely represented by black Reaganites contributed as well to a white backlash of many working-class white Americans. In pointing out the impotence of social welfare programmes and the centrality of people of colour within them, economists such as Loury and Sowell created and projected the perfect scapegoating strategy for millions of white Americans experiencing the pinch of a declining economic situation. The erroneous linkage between black Americans and social welfare programmes that 'drained' the American economy fed the white hysteria enveloping the nation in the 1980s, thus feeding a resurgence of whiteness as suggested in *Chapter 2*.²³

While white American politicians supportive of Reagan put forth a romanticised vision of America's mythical past, they, unlike many conservative black American leaders, continued to engage in the formal political arena. In addition to the dismantling

²² Recognising that the racial and ethnic politics of the Reagan era were much more complex than a simple division between black and white, there is not adequate space to rehearse all possibilities here. However, I would argue that the focus of the Reagan era, in terms of internal racial politics, was a largely an effort to further demean black Americans (except for the routine inclusion of an undifferentiated category of Latinos) and to elevate the cultural status of white Americans on the national stage. Furthermore, blacks served as the persistent point of comparison in assessing the relative 'success' of other groups, whether it was the Jewish population, Asian Americans, women, first-generation white ethnic immigrants, or otherwise.

²³ See p. 24.

of bureaucratic structures and civil rights programmes, the Republicans also constructed their own ideological vision of America. The consequences of post-industrialism conjoined with the post-civil rights era perplexed many white Americans with regard to their 'place' on the national scene. Additionally, the changing international political economy challenged America's position as *the* economic and military superpower. Feminist gains, multicultural awareness legislated through affirmative action policies, and the degradation of the previous ideals of white supremacy, Eurocentrism, heterosexism, and patriarchy all constituted an assault on the identities of white Americans, particularly men. However, this constituency largely comprised of white American males was the consequence of productivity from the Right as well as neglect from the Left. White Americans were absent from the liberal civil rights agenda with regard to identity politics or the recognition of a positive, affirmative identity. This neglect is understandable, as these men and women were and remain the most privileged grouping (generally) in the United States. But, the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of this group was not a priority for the Left; consequently there remained a void with regard to who 'represented' (ideologically) this group, a void acknowledged and seized by the Reagan-led Republican Party.²⁴

Reaganism is difficult to elucidate precisely because of the vagueness of its general ideals and programmatic strategy. The Reagan agenda was a contradiction in many ways. It espoused anti-statism or opposed government intervention in the public political sphere, but succeeded in legitimating such intervention in the private lives of American citizens. Although identity politics in its negative usage typically refers to the

²⁴ William E. Connolly writes, "The politics of welfare liberalism from the late sixties onward betrayed the white working class, driving a section of it toward a fundamentalism of gender, self, race, and nation. This is not merely a retrospective view of the situation; some of us within the democratic left articulated it during the period in question." See his Ch. 4: 'Fundamentalism in America,' pp. 105-133 in *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 113. Connolly conceives this aspect of the Reaganite project as 'social revenge' for the cultural alienation experienced by this constituency, while Neil Smith describes this same sentiment as 'revanchism,' a blend of revenge and reaction. See Smith's "Giuliani Time: The Revanchist 1990s," *Social Text* 57, vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 1-20. He writes, "Revanchism is in every respect the ugly cultural politics of neoliberal globalization. At different scales it represents a response spearheaded from the standpoint of white and middle-class interests against those people who, they feel, stole their world (and their power) from them." Ibid., p. 10.

retreat from class-based strategies on the Left²⁵ and a nationally divisive and economically detrimental politics on the Right, this study proposes that one of the successes of the Reagan Administration was to create and celebrate a national identity of whiteness, of white identity. This identity had been shaken to the core, and its natural entitlements put into question with the countercultural or new social movements of the previous decades. Reagan succinctly attracted neoliberals, neoconservatives, religious fundamentalists, and a New Right faction that was slowly gaining momentum, into a coherent political bloc, with strong, though often contradictory ideological objectives.²⁶

Abstractly, Reagan propounded disjointed conceptions of the traditional family, the community, and the nation in order to construct the ideal of the 'new American,' but rarely were these conceptions solidified through explicit definition. Partially, this work was accomplished through the stock, stereotypical images of black Americans validated by black neo-conservatives. Trite phrases loaded with poignant imagery such as 'the welfare cheat,' 'the welfare mother,' the 'underclass,' and black rapists and thugs were positioned as the antithesis of an idealised white America. But in subtracting these stereotypes, the white identity romanticised by Reagan was an empty signifier, a hollow, albeit powerful, conception that unified a population of white Americans.²⁷

²⁵ This point is made in Robin D.G. Kelley's article, "Identity Politics and Class Struggle," pp. 328-335 in Stephen Steinberg, ed., *Race and Ethnicity in the United States: Issues and Debates* (London: Blackwell, 2000). An argument made by many others, Kelley asserts that class politics cannot replace the necessary struggles for identity in the agenda for the American Left; that class politics is not necessarily a universal struggle. Furthermore, "The failure to conceive of these social movements as essential to the emancipation of the whole remains the fundamental stumbling block to building a deep and lasting class-based politics." p. 331.

²⁶ For a general overview of these varying tendencies in the Reagan Administration, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), particularly Ch. 7: 'Race and Reaction,' pp. 113-136.

²⁷ Missing from the historical exposition provided thus far is the figure of Jesse Jackson, erroneously named the 'first' black presidential candidate for the United States. Interestingly, in response to Reagan's symbolic importance, Jackson's 1984 candidacy appealed to blacks in a similar manner through the rhetoric of community and family, while simultaneously proposing the idea of a 'rainbow' coalition. Adolph Reed asserts that Jackson's campaign distorted black political discourse, as an actual political platform and strategies to cope with Reaganism were ignored in favour of simplistic racial identification. Objecting to his nomination was 'tantamount to treason' if one were black at this time; therefore, his campaign was thoroughly undemocratic. See Reed's *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in Afro-American Politics* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986).

Reagan occupied a centrally important role in symbolising the heroic, masculine, plain-speaking, common American. Through Reagan's iconography, many of his contradictory policies went unchallenged in his own ranks and increased the difficulty of forming an effective opposition. Oddly, the administration was unsuccessful in legislating some of these ideals, but damage was done simply through the dismantling of social welfare programmes. Therefore, the concentration of power within the administration resided in the executive branch but was not translated into effective legislation.

Economically, the administration accomplished little in the way of an increased standard of living for white Americans, but their identity was reaffirmed with the objective of reconstructing a mythical past for the nation, thus substituting symbolic for programmatic politics: It was an exercise in white nation-building and the creation of a viable and all-encompassing white culture. Many white Americans changed their party identification to Republican during this time period to politically protest their aversion to the ideals of the Democratic Party, which increasingly became linked with a derogatory identity politics. The diminishing party allegiance for white Americans raises interesting issues for an analysis of the intersection of race and politics. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, black Americans remained committed to the Democratic Party through the decades, regardless of the party's platform, in contrast to white Americans. Here, "racial solidarity trump[s] party affiliation" for whites where it does not for blacks, therefore reaffirming black Americans dogged defence of liberalism.²⁸ This stands in contrast to the perception of black Americans as voting 'black'; it might be more accurate to reserve this formulation for white Americans in the Age of Reagan who turned out in droves to vote 'white.' For that reason, it is worth considering that white Americans are as engaged in the business of identity politics as others.

²⁸ Jeffrey Adler makes this point with reference to urban city politics, but it is applicable to the national scene as well, in "Introduction," pp. 1-22 in David R. Colburn and Jeffrey Adler, eds., *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 3. This tendency in urban politics will be addressed in the upcoming sections of this chapter.

The Age of Reagan was a revolutionary period in American history, and encompasses the administration of President George Bush and continues into the new millennium with his familial successor. This era managed to render the interests of the new social movements antithetical to American ideals in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, coupled with a succinct and efficient erasure of recent American civil rights history. This shift marks one of the most detrimental eras in the history of the United States for all people. It embodies a rewriting of history in its most pernicious form.

III. Black Leadership in Urban Municipal Politics

While the national economy was undergoing reconstruction through the application of Reaganomics, the local economies of urban centres were undergoing massive changes as well, particularly in the northeastern corridor of the United States known as the ‘snowbelt’ or the ‘frostbelt.’ As the nation coped with post-industrialism, the industrial job market shifted southwards, westwards, and abroad.²⁹ Entering this political and economic quagmire was a new generation of black American leaders at the municipal level. Bolstered by the Great Society programmes and affirmative action legislation, these leaders had been supported by the liberal welfare state. But as mayors, commissioners, and council members, they entered the political scene lacking many of the federal resources and programmes that aided their ascendance in the political arena, funds that had been available to their predecessors. Nonetheless, Colburn and Adler, in their collection of essays on black American mayors, argue that between the years of 1967 and the mid-1990s mark “one of the most important shifts in twentieth-century American politics.”

After three and one-half centuries of complete or relative disfranchisement, African Americans rapidly assumed the mayor’s office in nearly every major city in the nation. Within sixteen years of the great breakthrough three of the four largest urban centers in the United States had elected African-American mayors, and in 1990 the nation’s biggest city, New York, followed suit. By 1993 African Americans had been elected mayor in

²⁹ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, pp. 114-115.

sixty-seven cities with populations of more than fifty thousand residents, and most had majority-white populations.³⁰

Extrapolating from Colburn and Adler's volume, the three major factors influencing this transformation in political power at the municipal level were changes in the national political structure, deindustrialisation, and demography. As the first two have received commentary, the third element, demography, will constitute the next focus of discussion.

Colburn and Adler are careful to distinguish their study from others who portray the advancement of black Americans in urban politics as one more stage in the tale of American ethnic succession.³¹ This view proposes that leadership changes naturally follow changes in population, so that if a city gains a large population of Irish-, Italian-, or Mexican-Americans, then these cities are more likely to elect someone from the same ethnic or racial group into political office. But the authors accept that this thesis is only partially correct, as it obscures evidence that electoral successes are often reliant on cross-group coalitions and alliances. Thus,

In crucial ways [...] group succession fails to explain fully the fortunes of African-American mayors. Because of the persistent influence of racism in American urban society, the experiences of African-American politicians stand apart from those of their ethnic predecessors, particularly with regard to governance itself. Established political institutions proved substantially less flexible for African Americans than for others. This does not deny the effects of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of prejudice or group conflict. Such discrimination, however, was not comparable to racial prejudice. [...] Modern polling data and political science studies demonstrate the intractability of racial hostility. [...] Thus the blossoming of African-American influence in urban politics has proved to be more complicated than simply the latest version of the familiar process of group succession.³²

Therefore, a model of ethnic succession does not properly account for the importance of race in American politics in its aim to explain electoral political success.³³

³⁰ Adler, "Introduction," in Colburn and Adler, *African-American Mayors*, p. 1. To illustrate the scale of change, it is worth continuing the excerpt from Adler. He writes, "The scope of the transformation was particularly apparent at the local level. In 1962 Atlanta's city hall remained 'strictly segregated with separate restrooms, drinking fountains, and employment listings' for African Americans and whites, the historian Jon C. Teaforde has noted. Moreover, a local ordinance forbade African-American police officers from arresting whites. Twelve years later Atlanta had an African-American mayor and an African-American police chief."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³³ The model of ethnic succession in the United States has a long history in sociological thought and studies. As Colburn and Adler explain, such models were developed in order to come to terms with the persistent problems facing black American communities in comparison with the 'advances' of first-generation European immigrants. These false comparisons have remained

Nonetheless internal migration patterns across the American landscape did influence the possibilities for electing black Americans into office. "Between 1910 and 1980 the proportion of African Americans living in cities rose from 27 percent to 85 percent, and since the 1950s African Americans have been more likely to live in cities than whites."³⁴ The 1970s in particular witnessed a severe out-migration of whites, termed 'white flight,' while the black population migrated inwards towards urban centres.³⁵ However, white Americans typically remained the population majority in cities electing black mayors,³⁶ but local economies often deteriorated with the exodus of white-owned businesses and corporations in addition to the purchasing power of white citizens.³⁷ Interestingly, the departure of significant numbers of white Americans also corresponded with increased political power for black Americans.³⁸ Thus, "[t]he shifting and conflicting

influential into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For an influential scholar of this model, see Chicago School of Sociology's Robert E. Park and his studies on the 'race relations cycle.'

³⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵ David Theo Goldberg points to the reversal of the 'white flight' syndrome, which is expressed in the term 'gentrification.' He writes: "Gentrification is a structural phenomenon tied to changing forms of capital accumulation and means of maximizing ground rent. It involves tax-assisted displacement of the long time inner city resident poor (usually the racially marginalized), renovation of the vacated residential space, upscaling the neighbourhood, and resettling the area with inhabitants of higher socio-economic status. The structural changes occur not only on the ground, so to speak, but in terms of capital formation [...]." See p. 55 in Goldberg's " 'Polluting the Body Politic': Racist Discourse and Urban Location," pp. 45-60 in Malcolm Cross and Michael Keith, eds., *Racism, the City, and the State* (London: Routledge, 1993). Although 'white flight' was a bane on the economies of urban centres, those blacks and other minorities who migrated inwards were certainly not 'at home' in the inner city. Public housing areas were often taken over or purchased chiefly on behalf of downtown corporations, thus displacing the current residents. A reverse inwards migration of white residents often followed the lead of businesses and corporations thus causing the real-estate value to skyrocket, thus becoming unavailable to lower-income city residents.

³⁶ Adler also clarifies that a population majority should not be conflated with a voting majority with regard to black Americans, as 'barriers to voting' remained, thus many blacks had yet to register to vote. "Introduction," in Colburn and Adler, *African-American Mayors*, p. 6.

³⁷ The importance of white purchasing power and capital is often neglected in capitalist theories of black self-reliance and empowerment in the United States. These theories assume that if a local economy constituted by black businesses is created, then blacks will no longer be reliant on whites for their well-being. In this, these theories are separatist in nature. As such, the assumption is based purely upon demography, but not on economics. Even if capital is available to establish black businesses, they must have customers who are able to pay for its services. Therefore, a stable and productive local economy, which buoys its citizens, is a prerequisite for the survival of 'black' business. It is naïve to assume that local economies, particularly race-based ones, have the capacity to function independently of state and national economies.

³⁸ Although, one must keep in mind that the flight to the suburbs was a class issue as much as it was a racial one. Middle-class black Americans also evacuated the deteriorating inner city urban areas, thus robbing the inner city partly of its black professional and managerial class. Thus the majority of those remaining in the inner city were poor blacks and Latinos.

tides of migration concentrated African-American residents in the inner city, producing “hypersegregation” on the one hand and surging political power on the other.”³⁹

Though the in-migration of black Americans increased the plurality of ethnic or racial voting blocks in urban cities, whites often remained the majority as stated above. The voting power of this majority necessitated coalition building and alliances in order for black leaders to attain political office. Combined with the economic devastation occurring nationally, black Americans had a great deal with which to contend upon entering office. They simultaneously dealt with the growing number of citizens living below the poverty line while attempting to rejuvenate the business districts of the inner city. These competing objectives often demanded contradictory economic policies.⁴⁰ So, one might ask how blacks were elected into political office at all? The next section will address this query through an examination of Philadelphian politics in the 1980s. The framework provided by Colburn and Adler’s collection on black American mayors resonates with the instance of Philadelphia, thus providing the local political background for an upcoming focus on MOVE.

IV. The Element of ‘Race’ in Philadelphia Politics: The Case of Mayor W. Wilson Goode

Caught at the intersection of contending political and racialised forces, partly of their own making, black municipal politicians—particularly mayors—exemplified the importance of symbolic politics in the Age of Reagan. Economically, Philadelphia was representative of the regional trends of the northeastern corridor as well as changes occurring at the national level. A large manufacturing hub for the rest of the nation, particularly in the steel industry, Philadelphia lost approximately fifty percent of its manufacturing jobs to

³⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰ Katherine Tate proposes that “the fiscal problems of local and state governments have limited the abilities of Black politicians to implement policies that can help alleviate the multiple and complex set of social and economic problems facing the Black poor. Because of their cities’ financial crises, Black mayors in general have opted for traditional business-oriented development policies, rather than community based redistributive programs [...]” Tate, *From Protest to Politics*, pp. 171-172.

southern or overseas locations. At the same time, blacks were migrating towards areas of the city that suffered the greatest deficit in labour employment opportunities.⁴¹

Table 3.1 Population Demographics of Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania 1980
Total Population: 1,688,210

White	983,084	[58%]
Black	638,878	[37.8%]
Asian	17,764	[1.05%]
American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	2,325	[0.14%]
Latino/Hispanic	63,570	[3.8%]

Source: *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1980: Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population: Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.⁴²

Table 3.2 Population Demographics of Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 1960-1990

Year	White	Black	Other
1960	1,467,479 [73%]	529,240 [26%]	5,793 [0.3%]
1970	1,278,710 [65%]	653,791 [34%]	16,101 [1%]
1980	983,084 [58%]	638,878 [38%]	66,248 [4%]
1990	848,586 [54%]	631,936 [40%]	105,055 [6%]

Source: *U.S. Census of Population, 1960-1990: Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population: Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

⁴¹ Carolyn Teich Adams, "Philadelphia: The Slide Toward Municipal Bankruptcy," pp. 29-46 in H.V. Savitch and John Clayton Thomas, eds., *Big City Politics in Transition*, Urban Affairs Annual Reviews, vol. 38 (Newbury Park: Sage, 1991), p. 30. Richard A. Keiser notes also that the City Charter, in contending with the legacy of machine politics, included "a rigid civil service system for the awarding of city jobs." This enabled blacks and other minorities to enter the system of municipal employment that had previously been foreclosed to them. See "The Rise of a Biracial Coalition in Philadelphia," pp. 49-72 in Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb, eds., *Racial Politics in American Cities* (New York: Longman Press, 1990).

⁴² Of the Asian population in Philadelphia, the largest national ethnic groups were Chinese and Filipino. Of the Latino population, 46,990 or 74% of this group was comprised of Puerto Ricans of which 19,615 (25%) identified themselves as racially white, 5,393 (8.5%) identified as black, and the majority, 38,562 (61%) identified as 'Other.'

Philadelphia's population profile thus exemplifies the pattern of white out-migration and black in-migration analysed by Colburn and Adler in urban centres across the nation (See Tables 3.1 and 3.2 above).

Philadelphia is a unique example in terms of urban economics, as it is both a city as well as a county government. As such, it is responsible for more social services than a city enabled to tap into external reserves of county funding. Therefore, in the 1980s, Reagan's laissez-faire economic policies impacted Philadelphia's economy more devastatingly than most. Specifically, he rescinded funding for a federal programme called CETA or the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which provided monies for basic municipal employee positions. Adams notes, "Altogether, federal aid to Philadelphia declined from more than \$250 million in 1981 to only \$54 million in 1990."⁴³ To compensate for a loss of \$196 million in federal funding, the city and county of Philadelphia appropriated wage taxes to support and maintain the positions of fundamental city employees. Therefore, municipal politicians in power during this time period struggled to merely keep the city up and running.

These elements characterise the state of the Philadelphia economy when Mayor Wilson Goode entered power as the city's first black American mayor at the close of 1983, or as head of the city's executive branch. Philadelphia's political structure is governed by the City Charter of 1951, which created a strong role for the mayor in addition to specifying the continual presence of party opposition in the City Council—the legislative branch of city government.⁴⁴ Adams adds that the City Council has maintained a Democratic majority since the inception of the Charter.⁴⁵

The division between the mayoral post and city council has been particularly problematic for Philadelphia in the cases of both Wilson Goode, as well as his

⁴³ Adams, "Philadelphia," p. 32.

⁴⁴ The City Council is a part-time legislative body of the city government, and its role is limited by the City Charter to the creation of policy and enacting of laws. The principal means by which the City Council can induce change is through the creation of bills. Therefore, the executive branch orchestrates day-to-day operations of city government and its decision-making processes.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Democratic predecessor, William Green. Colburn and Adler often render the division between the legislative and executive branches either as mere racial politicking when blacks are in the mayoral post, or as the product of the continued workings of a former Democratic machine. However, in the case of Philadelphia, this divisiveness is also the result of the commitment of city council members to their neighbourhood constituencies. Goode and Green, who were both beholden to business interests and corporate executives, contrasted with the council members' allegiances to their wards. Particularly, the city council butted heads with Goode over its refusal to retreat from grassroots' sentiment regarding downtown corporate development. The often dissimilar and divergent interests between the mayor and the city council majority created a climate of inaction over pertinent issues facing the city. But before thoroughly examining the workings of the Goode Administration, let us take account of the political climate in which he took office as Philadelphia's first black American mayor.

Philadelphia's political scene was completely dominated in the 1970s under the Democratic mayoral leadership of Frank Rizzo. In fact, the mayoral position along with the majority of the city council members has remained Democratic from the 1960s onwards.⁴⁶ Adams attributes this trend to the workings of machine politics that are part and parcel of Philadelphia's history.

Political historians have emphasized the persistence of political machines in Philadelphia, citing the Republican machine that dominated the first half of the twentieth century and then the Democratic machine built by Congressman William Green in the 1960s. [...] A survey of the last 40 years might at first glance suggest that the Democratic machine remains intact. [...] Almost three quarters of all registered voters in Philadelphia remain Democrats. This apparent hegemony, however, covers a reality of startling disarray in the majority coalition.⁴⁷

According to Adams, this disarray resulted from a disjunction between the party leadership, which sought to reform the Democratic Party, and "rowhouse" Democrats who represented the white, working-class side of the party. The rowhouse democrats succeeded in pushing their mayoral candidates, James Tate as well as his successor, Frank

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the Governor of the State of Pennsylvania across the Rizzo, Green, and Goode administrations was a Republican, Governor Dick Thornburgh. He was in office from 1979-1987.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Rizzo, into the mayoral seat when the leadership failed. The weakness of the democratic reformers resulted from the out-migration of middle-class whites as well as their “unwillingness to institutionalize their control by using patronage, contracts, and the other spoils of office. They foreswore such trappings of old-style machine politics.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the Democratic Party leadership no longer wielded power and control over the party nominations or the voters to accept their candidate. As a consequence of the decreasing availability of federal funds, however, machine politicking was no longer an option as monies or material rewards were not available to ‘buy’ alliances or coalitions in the Philadelphia Democratic Party.⁴⁹

This transition period was ripe for the election of a black mayor, thus leading to the election of Goode. The pattern of allegiances and patronage had been disrupted, therefore presenting an opening for an atypically non-white candidate. Although Goode identified himself as a black American and was recognised as being such, it would be disingenuous to present him as someone who departed radically from the political mould that shaped his career in Philadelphia politics.⁵⁰ He had served under Green as the city’s Managing Director and was known as Green’s ‘right-hand man.’ Therefore, Green’s Administration and coalition-building had eased white voters into the possibility of electing a black mayor.⁵¹

While many white Americans undoubtedly supported black mayoral candidates as a consequence of the candidate’s credibility, prior experience in municipal politics, or charisma perhaps, many more advocated a black candidate in reaction to the changing urban landscape and the perceived need to ‘control’ the burgeoning black population.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁰ In fact, very few of the successful black mayoral candidates during this time period displayed radical political tendencies. Most were thoroughly mainstream, middle-class, male democrats.

⁵¹ David R. Colburn, “Running for Office: African-American Mayors from 1967 to 1996,” pp. 23-56 in Colburn and Adler, *African-American Mayors*, p. 39.

⁵² It is important to note that all of the examples of successful black mayoral candidates encountered in research for this study were running as a Democratic candidate. Although black neo-conservatives may have made inroads to the Republican Party at the national level, this was not the case in municipal politics.

Crime rates in the inner city skyrocketed in response to the economic downturn and decreasing opportunities for economic advancement, and much of this criminal activity took place in black and Latino neighbourhoods, albeit activity that was primarily directed inwards to these same communities. More significant in terms of policy and public opinion were the unsightly reminders of poverty and criminality that threatened attempts to rejuvenate the corporate heart of the city. The measures taken by white American mayors to combat 'black' crime often had been one of brutal repression and terrorism that ignored the civil rights of the communities involved. Most often, these tactics not only failed to reduce criminal activity, they also exacerbated the distrust of law enforcement held by many communities of colour. Therefore, it was perceived that black mayors could restore stability to the inner city.

For Philadelphia, Mayor Frank Rizzo embodied the kind of politician that would bring the government down on black criminals. This approach galvanised support from white Philadelphians who perceived the ills of the city as resulting from black encroachment into their territory. He has been noted for the refusal to allow government housing projects into predominantly white neighbourhoods, thus 'protecting' white homeowners from declining property values and a destruction of their way of life. He was known as "the Mayor who wore a billy club in his tuxedo cummerbund,"⁵³ and his former post as Chief of Police only added a misguided credibility to his oppressive tactics.⁵⁴

When Goode appeared on the scene, Philadelphia's marginalised communities were adamant about instituting reforms in the city's law enforcement division. Ironically,

⁵³ Linda Wright Avery, "Coming to terms with MOVE," from the addendum to *Voices from the Community* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1986), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Adams attributes the emergence of a black section in the Democratic Party to the heavy arm of the Rizzo Administration. His attempt to amend the City Charter of 1951 to allow for a third-term in the mayoral position, mobilised blacks to register and vote in unprecedented numbers to ensure his defeat to candidate Green. Adams, "Philadelphia," p. 37. Keiser notes that Rizzo obtained the position of the Chief of Police under Tate in an attempt to prevent white voters from defecting to the Republican Party. Tate also disposed of the civilian police review board, which presumably had the potential of exposing the questionable practices of the police department. Tate's actions and his support for such an undesirable successor in the form of Frank Rizzo combined to inspire "77 percent of the voters in predominantly black wards" to defect from Democratic Party and vote for reform liberal Thacher Longstreth. Keiser compares this to the turnout for Tate in the previous campaign where Tate had received 70 percent of the black vote. See Keiser, "The Rise of a Biracial Coalition," in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, *Racial Politics*, pp. 53-55.

although these communities had been the primary focus of the policing effort thus far, they were also the most susceptible to acts of violent crime. Thus, these communities were policed but not protected. Yet,

fear of African-American unrest, rather than faith in African-American leadership, thus motivated some whites to cross racial lines in municipal elections. Moreover, the rise of African-Americans followed the concentration and isolation of African Americans in central cities, as white flight, redlining, and other processes contributed to racial segregation. In fact, African Americans secured office disproportionately in the most segregated cities.⁵⁵

Therefore, these strange bedfellows, both white and black Philadelphians demanding law and order, although desiring this intervention differently, ushered Goode into office.

Although the forces inaugurating Goode into office were often racialised, his own campaign in 1983 was “resolutely nonracial.”⁵⁶ In the primary election, Goode was pitted against Rizzo, who had resurfaced to run for another term after a one-term absence from the political scene. Corresponding to Goode’s unwillingness to directly address race, Rizzo retreated from his explicit courting of white voters, which partly marked the changing tenor of racial and ethnic politics in the city as well as the importance of the black vote in achieving electoral success. This is evidenced in Table 3.2, which demonstrates the steady increase of Philadelphia’s non-white population in comparison to the decreasing (but still majority) white population.⁵⁷ Keiser reports that Goode claimed 53% of the vote to Rizzo’s 43%; additionally, 91% of registered black voters, 66% of Latino voters, and 18% of white voters backed Goode in the primary, and the numbers increased by 6%, 11%, and 5% respectively in the general election against Republican candidate John Egan and independent candidate Thomas Leonard.⁵⁸ Therefore, black voters maintained a heavy influence in electing Goode into the mayoral post.

Another constituency that supported Goode was a group of Philadelphia business leaders operating under the aegis of the Greater Philadelphia First Corporation (GPFC).

⁵⁵ Adler, “Introduction,” in Colburn and Adler, *African-American Mayors*, p. 12; Keiser, “The Rise of a Biracial Coalition,” in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, *Racial Politics*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Adams, “Philadelphia,” p. 35.

⁵⁷ See p. 73.

⁵⁸ Keiser, “The Rise of a Biracial Coalition,” in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, *Racial Politics*, p. 61.

Although shunned throughout the Rizzo and Tate Administrations, Goode welcomed the support of business leaders during his campaign.⁵⁹ He marketed himself as a fair, impartial man from humble beginnings, who had worked himself out of poverty and into a historical role as Philadelphia's first black American mayor; this image was particularly attractive to the business community. Therefore, he was black but not radical, experienced in the business world, and most importantly, willing to let the business community influence both the structure of his administration as well as its policies. As mentioned at the head of this section, once in the mayoral office, Goode often pandered to business leaders to the disdain of city council members and others who had assisted his rise to municipal power. However, it is inaccurate to perceive this relationship as coercive or manipulative, as Goode's municipal career reveals his amenability to such business interests and projects.

The overall trend in Democratic politics from the national to municipal levels was one of growth and development. Partly, this was in response to the transition from a manufacturing to a service economy, and an attempt to retain corporate capital in the nation's urban centres. Also, it was a way of contending with the administration's own laissez-faire policies. This strain of development historically has been unfavourable for black Americans in urban areas. As whites migrate outwards towards the suburbs, blacks are left to fund these corporate enterprises through taxation, though rarely gaining from such projects.⁶⁰ Adams asserts that the suburbanisation of Philadelphia's white population and upper middle-class blacks not only drained labour resources from the city, but also drained funds appropriated from taxation. Although a large number of suburbanites

⁵⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁰ Johanna Fernandez notes: "The failure of urban development initiatives is tied to their intrinsic logic. Premised on the myth that poverty can be overcome by the development of a competitive business sector in the ghetto, they fail to address the roots of poverty: unemployment, low wages, poor housing, inadequate education, and lack of access to healthcare." See p. 111 in "The Fire This Time: Harlem and Its Discontents at the Turn of the Century," pp. 108-120 in Manning Marable, *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). Fernandez presents an interesting micropolitical study regarding urban development in the Harlem area of New York City. Specifically, she focuses on 'the Empowerment Zone,' a 1990s legacy of Reaganomics, which spurred gentrification in Harlem, including the destabilisation of long-standing community businesses and institutions to the detriment of Harlemites.

commuted into and utilised the city's public services, they were essentially parasitic on the city, as their contributions in the form of taxes were no longer available.⁶¹ Therefore, lower-income Philadelphians inadvertently subsidised the city's growth.

Through the Goode Administration's commensurability with a growth agenda, Philadelphia's unemployed and working poor bore the brunt of development but were largely unaided. For black Philadelphians, much was achieved in terms of symbolic politics, or the integration and recognition of blacks in the political arena, but little was done in the way of economic redistribution. The other area in which Goode failed to deliver for low-income Philadelphians was the creation of public housing, an area in which he had previous expertise.⁶² Instead, these funds were diverted into corporate development projects. The accomplishments claimed by the Goode Administration during his first term were a declining level of police brutality, an increase in the number of service sector jobs, and the election of blacks into municipal posts.⁶³ City Hall reports:

Recognizing that a strong economy is critical to the city's future, one of our Administration's first priorities was to create more jobs and stimulate an environment which encourages investment and business growth.

Today, Philadelphia's economy is booming. There has been a dramatic resurgence in employment in the city, and building cranes dominate the horizon throughout Philadelphia.

During the past two years more than \$3 billion has been committed to new development in Philadelphia. This is an unprecedented level of investment, and establishes our city as one of the nation's fastest growing markets.

It is especially gratifying to note that this Administration's leadership has been cited by investors and new employers as a major factor in their decisions to locate in Philadelphia.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Adams, "Philadelphia," p. 40. This issue is very complex, as Adams also adds that those suburbanites who work in the city are taxed on their wages, but are not able to influence the tax rates created by the City Council thus enforcing "taxation without representation." This issue has decreased the state's ability to legislate on other pertinent, but related issues for the region, as the wage tax is used as a leveraging tool between urban and suburban representatives thus stagnating the legislative process as a whole.

⁶² Keiser, "The Rise of a Biracial Coalition," in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, *Racial Politics*, p. 63.

⁶³ Office of Mayor W. Wilson Goode, *City of Philadelphia Midterm Report 1984-1985* (City of Philadelphia: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1986). Keiser, "The Rise of a Biracial Coalition," in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, *Racial Politics*, p. 65, notes that 60% of Goode's agency chiefs were black compared to his predecessor's 30%. Also in comparing Goode's and Green's respective administrations regarding municipal jobs, under Green's leadership, blacks comprised 28%, Latinos 1%, and whites 70% of the workforce. Under Goode, blacks comprised 41%, Latinos 14%, and whites 45% of the municipal workforce.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 2. See also Office of Mayor W. Wilson Goode, *City of Philadelphia: Accomplishments for 1984, Challenges for 1985, Visions through 1990* (City of Philadelphia: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1985).

This report presents the Goode Administration's laundry list of accomplishments for the first two years of office, and most reflect the concentration of development activity in the city's business district, or Philadelphia's Center City project. This includes the construction of a \$130 million office tower for Urban Investment & Development Co., a \$600 million Liberty Place tower, and \$300 million twin towers for the computer giant, IBM. Additionally, Philadelphia was the recipient of ten revenue-sharing grants under the federal Urban Development Action Grants Program (UDAG), which totalled \$12.5 million in federal funds in addition to \$82 million in private investment, yet all of these funds were put into commercial and shopping districts. Although these funds improved the image of particular neighbourhoods as well as creating jobs in the area, the extremely deprived areas of the city were left untouched.

V. The History of MOVE in Philadelphia

Having provided a general historical framework of the Age of Reagan and Philadelphia's local political system in the 1970s and 1980s, this study will now progress into an augmented portrayal of MOVE's tenuous position in Philadelphian history. This section will address MOVE's materialisation in Powelton Village in the 1970s through its tenure on Osage Avenue in the 1980s, thus culminating with the conflagration on 13 May 1985.

A. Part I: Powelton Village

The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia, jointly researched by Assefa and Wahrhaftig, approaches the history of MOVE from the perspective of conflict resolution and mediation.⁶⁵ Concerning Powelton Village, their research highlights the emergence of various individuals and groups who attempted to debate openly about the conflict centring

⁶⁵ Hizkias Assefa and Paul Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis in Philadelphia: Extremist Groups and Conflict Resolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990/1988).

upon MOVE and the manner in which their efforts were thwarted. In so doing, the impact of Mayor Frank Rizzo becomes crucial to an understanding of MOVE's tactics and its resonance among Philadelphia's communities in the 1970s. Again, despite the fact that the city's minority racial composition swelled, "Philadelphia in the 1970s seemed to go through a period of denial and repression, actually reversing, during the mayoralty of Frank Rizzo, gains that had been made in biracial political coalitions."⁶⁶ Amongst Powelton Village residents, Rizzo's Administration was problematic due to his redevelopment policies and their effect on poor and black residents in particular.

Within this context, relations between MOVE members and the other Powelton Village residents steadily deteriorated. Neighbours were concerned about the increasing militancy and aggressiveness of the MOVE members. MOVE countered these accusations "by pointing out how the neighbors' way of life offended them equally."⁶⁷ MOVE's relationship with the police also declined. The members claimed police brutality and armed themselves. As a result, the court charged approximately a dozen members with weapons violations.

Conflict negotiators were not involved until the city established a large police presence in the area. On the one hand, residents of Powelton Village were outraged at MOVE's antics. However, they also objected to the occupation of their neighbourhood, in addition to the maltreatment of MOVE members by Philadelphia law enforcement. Any team of mediators entering into this melee of double-edged objectives and mounting aggressiveness on behalf of all involved faced numerous obstacles. Crucially, the objectives of the police began to usurp those of the neighbourhood, thereby legitimating its use of force.

Indeed, it was the disagreement over the degree of police involvement that prompted the formation of approximately seven documented organisations in Powelton Village. For example, the Powelton Emergency Human Rights Committee (PEHRC)

⁶⁶ Robin Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 12.

⁶⁷ Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, p. 20.

focused on the eviction of MOVE from the neighbourhood for fear of “declining property values” and potential health hazards arising from MOVE’s lifestyle. Another, the Powelton United Neighbours (PUN), opposed police intervention and was concerned about the repressive treatment of MOVE members and the potential for wide-scale violence. Furthermore, “PUN presented a petition to the mayor and other city officials pointing out that the police siege was dividing the community along racial lines by prohibiting black people from entering areas near the MOVE headquarters while allowing whites through.”⁶⁸ Although Powelton Village proclaimed the diversity of its residents and its ability to resolve issues peacefully, the conflict began to exhibit racial overtones, as groups were created specifically to address the ‘racist’ attitudes and actions of the police department and Rizzo’s Administration.

The Concerned Citizens to Ensure Justice for MOVE and the African Peoples’ Cadre Organization, both predominantly black organisations, supported MOVE on the grounds that they too, as black individuals, were suffering harassment from the police. In addition to these interest groups, another—the Tuesday Night Group—arose to keep the lines of communication open between all involved and to serve as a “clearing house” with regard to identifying the viewpoints of each group and areas of overlapping interests.⁶⁹ From the multiplicity of parties represented, the MOVE conflict embroiled the entire neighbourhood in an ongoing discussion. But, in going beyond the negative connotations associated with the word ‘conflict,’ the proliferation of groups formed in response to this particular issue and the tenacity with which each appeared to relay its perspective to the wider public is worthy of further study.

Throughout 1977 various attempts at mediation were made to resolve conflicts between the residents of Powelton Village and MOVE. Clergymen, members of the Quaker faith, and professional hostage crisis experts all took their turn in trying to facilitate compromise or resolution to the conflict. Assefa and Wahrhaftig cite one

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 33.

example whereby an agreement over the visibility and odour of garbage in MOVE's yard was reached.

Some members of the Tuesday Night Group were able to successfully negotiate two agreements with MOVE. One dealt with the garbage and rat problem. MOVE agreed to recycle its waste by composting it. This was an accepted organic gardening technique for turning vegetable matter into soil. It was a mutually satisfactory solution since it was in accord with MOVE's philosophy, and at the same time reduced the odor and rat population for the neighbors.⁷⁰

The nature of the negotiation succeeded because of its creativity, its ability to take into account not only the practical necessity of alleviating a waste problem, but also MOVE's philosophical mandate to protect the environment. Any agreement forced upon either party would have further compromised neighbourhood relations. As stated by Assefa and Wahrhaftig, the police presence became the all-consuming issue, eventually displacing the neighbourhood's concerns in favour of those of the city administration. Disengaged from its conditions and parties of origin, the 'MOVE issue' began to take on a life of its own.

Once the neighbourhood, police, and court issues merged, the residents were excluded from deliberations. The effect of sidestepping the residents of Powelton Village was that the city adopted the most extreme position of one neighbourhood faction. The particular position was PEHRC's initial demand that MOVE be removed from the area. As PEHRC was not represented in the negotiations, it could not modify the demand, and the position was treated as a fixed parameter. Had the neighbourhood been represented in the negotiations, an alternative settlement might have evolved.

Another factor in the escalation of the MOVE conflict is the matter of MOVE's definition. Throughout the material on MOVE is the variability of terms with which it is characterised: neighbourhood nuisance, environmental revolutionaries, social activists, political movement, criminals, and terrorist group. Wagner-Pacifici states,

The odd and perplexing thing is that so many diverse characterizations continually hover about the group, as if they are in perpetual storage available for moments of crystallization to give a face to the emergent legal, communal, and civil conflicts.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 51.

⁷¹ Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 15.

Once again, the issue of labelling is of paramount importance with each term carrying its own discursive baggage, thus altering the perceived foundation of the conflict.

MOVE saw itself as a revolutionary political movement. [...] The city, on the other hand, responded with traditional police procedures that were derived from their experience in dealing with criminals. Unlike a criminal group, which might respond to punishment and deterrence, a group that sees itself as a revolutionary political movement might even be strengthened. [...] Furthermore broad press coverage of the negotiations encouraged the parties to talk past each other in their attempt to impress the public about the justifiability of their respective positions. [...] On the other hand, the media focus on the conflict at times may have restrained the parties from using force.⁷²

Ultimately, the Philadelphia Police Department violently confronted MOVE in August 1978 as a result of failed negotiation attempts and the increasing pressure of a police blockade in Powelton Village. In the crossfire, a police officer—James Ramp—was killed by gunfire; MOVE members claimed that the murder occurred at the hands of Ramp's fellow officers. Although the nature of Ramp's death had yet to be established, ten MOVE members were convicted of his murder in August of 1981. In the midst of the shootout, three officers were seen abusing one of the MOVE members, Delbert Africa, by dragging him by his hair, beating and kicking him while he lay on the ground. Although a television crew filmed the footage, the police officers were acquitted on all charges on 2 February 1981.⁷³

B. Part II: Osage Avenue

Assefa and Wahrhaftig assert that the "roots of the Osage Avenue conflict lie in Powelton Village."⁷⁴ Their previous assessment of the unresolved hostility between the police department and MOVE, stemming from the 1978 confrontation, is particularly salient to this point. After the armed confrontation in Powelton Village, city officials ordered the destruction of the MOVE residence, symbolically obliterating the space that MOVE had occupied. Prior to the confrontation in 1978, officials had planned to raze the building as

⁷² Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, pp. 92-93.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 100.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 98.

soon as it was vacated “to prevent it from becoming a cult-type symbol.”⁷⁵ The destruction of the building also had consequences with regard to the trial of Ramp’s murder. Evidence indicating the trajectory of the bullet that killed Ramp was destroyed in this process.⁷⁶

The remaining members relocated to at least two known homes in metropolitan Philadelphia, and one outside the state of Pennsylvania. However, the majority of members relocated to a house at 6221 Osage Avenue that belonged to John Africa’s sister, Louise James Africa. “At least some of those MOVE members living in the house were familiar to the other residents, having grown up in the neighborhood.”⁷⁷ In contrast with Powelton Village, Osage Avenue is described in overwhelmingly middle-class terms.⁷⁸ These are residents who had accrued a certain degree of respectability as a result of working up through the ranks of the housing establishment. As a predominantly black, home-owning neighbourhood, the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood was conspicuous in the urban cities of the United States during the 1980s.⁷⁹ In Table 3.3 below, we can observe the income and poverty differentiation between white and black Philadelphian families generally, as well as the median status of the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood in particular.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 105.

⁷⁷ Wagner-Pacifi, *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Margot Harry, in her account of the 1985 incident, explains: “The Cobbs Creek Park neighborhood of West Philadelphia was born at the turn of the century. Formerly a tough, down-at-the-heels blue-collar mill community, the area was transformed once the Frankford El was completed in 1906, affording workers access to inner-city jobs. [...] For nearly half a century the neighborhood was predominantly Jewish, with people either commuting to their jobs or establishing small neighborhood businesses. But starting in the mid-1950s—reflecting a “white flight” pattern occurring on a massive scale in many of the older eastern cities—the Cobbs Creek residents pulled up stakes and piled into nearby, newly created suburbs. As the whites left, Blacks began moving in to replace them. Today the neighborhood is 95 percent Black, comprised of people who viewed moving to the Cobbs Creek area as a major step up and away from Philadelphia’s vast and fettering ghettos. A stable, quiet, and proud neighborhood, its residents include teachers, postal workers, keypunch operators, civil servants, small businessmen, and retirees. Most of the houses are owned rather than rented, and it’s the kind of neighborhood where people work two or even three jobs to pay off the mortgage and send their kids to college.” See Harry’s *“Attention, MOVE! This is America!”* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1987), pp. 7-8.

⁷⁹ Wagner-Pacifi cites that by 1980, 162,448 out of a total of 638,878 black residents lived in West Philadelphia. 51.9% of West Philadelphian residents owned their homes, and in the 1980s, “25% of the annual income of black homeowners went towards costs of ownership.” *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 65. Her statistics are taken from the Urban League of Philadelphia, *The State of Black Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: Urban League of Philadelphia, 1985).

Table 3.3 Income and Poverty Status [Families]: Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania 1979

	County Total	Blacks	Whites	Cobbs Creek
Median Income (\$)	16,388	12,048	19,135	16,424
Mean Income (\$)	18,891	14,843	21,595	17,972
Per Capita (\$)	6,053	4,528	7,192	5,402
% Below Poverty Level	16.6	28.6	8.3	18.5
% with Public Assistance Income	17.0	31.0	8.3	18.4

Source: *U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1980: Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population: Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.⁸⁰

Initially, the relationship between MOVE members and their new neighbours was positive, and many were familiar with the Powelton Village events. However, MOVE began petitioning the new administration about the wrongful imprisonment of those convicted for Ramp's death. Wilson Goode met with the members, but claimed not to have the authority to act on the matter. MOVE therefore initiated a campaign of provocation against political leaders by protesting over a loudspeaker. Its language was harsh, threatening, and profane. Once again, Philadelphia's residents found themselves wedged between the city and MOVE. After an aborted police action on the sixth anniversary of the 1978 confrontation, MOVE members began fortifying their house with wood, steel, and railroad ties. The Osage Avenue residents eventually appealed to Goode and other politicians for help.⁸¹

However, Goode expressed that he was incapable of finding a solution to the issue with MOVE. He stated, "We simply could not go into the MOVE house and arrest people because neighbors had complained about their lifestyle. [...] I had no more

⁸⁰ The figures provided here for the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood are estimated from a layout of the census tracts of Philadelphia County; they are confirmed by other studies on MOVE. According to these statistics, in Cobbs Creek, where Osage Avenue is located, 93.8% of the population is black, 0.5% is white, and 0.06% is of Latino/Hispanic origin.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

discussions with neighbors about the MOVE house for nearly a year. Nor were there any reports about MOVE from commissioners, cabinet officers, or the police.”⁸²

Although legal action may not have been possible, Goode possessed the capacity to ensure that a negotiation project was in place to address the neighbours concerns as well as that of MOVE. Furthermore, as an active political figure in Philadelphia through Rizzo’s Administration, Goode was aware of the past circumstances of MOVE’s history in the city. Additionally, he had founded a crisis response organisation during his tenure as city manager under his predecessor, Bill Green, one designed to address complex situations such as that of MOVE.⁸³ With this background, he possessed the necessary resources to enable the city’s meaningful involvement with the Osage Avenue residents.

At this time, the emphasis for the MOVE members shifted from a lifestyle conflict to a legal issue regarding the wrongful incarceration of fellow members for the death of James Ramp; therefore, the focus on neighbourhood issues became of secondary importance, in principle, to the release of imprisoned MOVE members. However, this shift does not preclude the prominent position occupied by the Osage Avenue residents in the ongoing feud between the city administration and MOVE. The neighbours served as leverage for MOVE in terms of placing demands upon Goode and his colleagues. Adopting this perspective, the neighbours’ resolve was crucial for MOVE in that they were presumed to have the sufficient status, as a middle-class, home-owning, black neighbourhood, to negotiate the interaction between themselves and MOVE, a status that MOVE did not possess. Furthermore, direct involvement on behalf of the city was the only avenue of redress widely accepted among the Osage Avenue residents in contrast to those in Powelton Village.⁸⁴

⁸² W. Wilson Goode and Joann Stevens, *In Goode Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1992), p. 209.

⁸³ Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, pp. 101-102.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Wagner-Pacifici also observes the reliance of the Osage Avenue residents on city involvement due to the faith placed in the class status of the neighbourhood and its attendant privileges.

On the other hand, the neighbors of MOVE, all African-American, were in their subordination under- and unrepresented, the flip side of the proliferation of terms being representational neglect. These neighbors worked hard to be named a normal, rights-bearing citizens, a discursive strategy that ultimately failed in its material effectiveness.⁸⁵

Regardless of public complaints, the city adopted a policy of non-intervention with regard to MOVE. Relatively minor details, such as unpaid utility bills, were the only “problems” that drew the attention of city agencies. Therefore, the actions taken were reactive and failed to de-escalate the conflict.

From the close of 1983 until early May 1985, the tension enveloping Osage Avenue intensified. All forms of civilian intervention dissolved by the second half of 1984, leaving the solution of the conflict solely in the hands of law enforcement. MOVE members fortified their house by boarding windows and primary entrances. At the same time, the MOVE residence was also under official surveillance by the police department, and Osage Avenue was blockaded to keep non-residents out, while confining MOVE members to a finite location.

On April 29 [1985], neighbors and police surveillance officers listened as MOVE members threatened to kill the mayor and any police that would dare come in the MOVE residence. [...] Soon after, the neighbors held a press conference to complain that the city had consistently ignored their grievances. They threatened to take the matter into their own hands, and asked the governor and attorney general for help.⁸⁶

Goode subsequently organised a gathering of the key political players in Philadelphia to respond to the concerns of the Cobbs Creek Park community. The city’s managing director, the police commissioner, the district attorney, and Goode developed a plan to serve the MOVE members with outstanding arrest warrants, warrants that were obtained more than a year prior but had not been followed up by any city official.⁸⁷ The serving of

⁸⁵ Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 42.

⁸⁶ Assefa and Wahrhaftig, *The MOVE Crisis*, p. 111.

⁸⁷ The members of the Philadelphia City Council were not included in these discussions, and no reference to them was made in the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC) findings or the Grand Jury conclusions with regard to the planning stages of the confrontation. Involving the City Council may have opened up the city government to greater scrutiny from the beginning.

the arrest warrants was to take place on 13 May 1985, and the police commissioner, Gregore Sambor, took charge of this operation. Although the mayor and his colleagues may have intended to minimise violent conflict through the deliverance of the arrest warrants, the operation devised by Sambor expressed the contrary. The MOVE children were to be removed from the premises, a structure on top of the MOVE house would be destroyed through the use of high-pressured water hoses, and tear gas would be thrown inside the house to disorient the remaining members inside. The actions taken were not designed to intervene in the conflict between MOVE and its neighbours, but rather to dislocate and to deconstruct the group. The conflation of the objectives of two interested parties—the motivations of the neighbours and the motivations of the city agencies—led to disastrous consequences for all involved.

On 13 May 1985, police forces descended upon 6221 Osage Avenue and demanded that several MOVE members surrender. On the previous day, all Osage Avenue residents excluding MOVE were instructed to evacuate their homes. The residents were not informed of the precise actions to be taken against MOVE either prior to or after their evacuation. During the following twenty-four hours the MOVE residence and the members inside were subjected to tear gas, 10,000 rounds of live ammunition, machine guns, explosives, and antitank weapons in an attempt to secure the arrest of the members.⁸⁸ A helicopter dropped a bomb on top of the MOVE residence, supposedly to dislodge a bunker or a structure that the members had constructed on top of their row house.

It failed to dislodge the bunker immediately, but it ignited the gasoline tank and started a fire. The police and fire commissioners let the bunker burn. The flames quickly engulfed the house and spread to the neighboring homes. [...] Fire destroyed 61 homes, damaged 110 others, and killed 11 occupants of the MOVE home, 5 of them children. Some 250 men, women, and children were left homeless. Of those in MOVE's house, only one woman and one child survived: Ramona and Birdie Africa.⁸⁹

All in all, the level of correspondence between city officials at this stage was minimal. Thus, for an operation of this magnitude, the planning process was extremely informal and secretive.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Both Birdie and Ramona Africa were taken to separate hospitals and treated for their injuries. Birdie was placed under protective police custody in case MOVE members or sympathisers attempted to 'kidnap' him, and Ramona Africa was placed under arrest.

An investigative commission was established subsequently to determine if any parties involved were negligent in their efforts to diffuse the situation before resorting to such drastic and violent actions. Principally, the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC), whose official findings were released on 6 March 1986, absolved all members of the city government from accountability during the 13 May 1985 assault. The PSIC report did condemn the procedures and actions taken by Goode's Administration, but the emphasis rested on the planning and execution instead of the methods employed to resolve the MOVE situation. Race and subsequently racism were identified in the report as playing a role in the treatment and destruction of Osage Avenue and surrounding areas, but again, direct responsibility was not levied against any particular individual or city office. The PSIC never possessed formal legal powers, as it was a civil commission. This was also true of the 1986 Grand Jury investigation, as none of the officials in Goode's Administration were held legally or criminally responsible regarding the actions taken on 13 May 1985, neither for the ensuing deaths of the eleven MOVE members nor the unmitigated destruction of private property.

VI. Summary

In this chapter, it was established that in municipal governments, liberalism and the pre-eminence of capitalism or free market ideology within it, imparts an economic practicality to governing. In reviewing the framework of Colburn and Adler's volume as well as a general consideration of Goode's Administration, it is clear that urban residents who are the most deprived, and therefore the most in need of economic assistance and redistribution, come in a distant second to pro-growth and development interests. Many conceive of this complex political situation as a failure of formal black American politics,

but this is not the case. It would be erroneous to assume that the lives of black American citizens have not improved with the election of black individuals into municipal office as well as changing white Americans' perceptions of blacks in general. Mayors and city council members exemplify the importance of symbolic politics, as they are perhaps the most overt representatives of black Americans' participation in the political process. As opposed to politicians at the national level, they are involved in the day-to-day operation of the locale. However, the symbolic victory in electoral politics has not translated into concrete, material gains and directives for many black Americans. Additionally, as Colburn and Adler have demonstrated, more likely than not, municipal administrations headed by black Americans in the Age of Reagan were contending with 'white flight' leading to the suburbanisation of resources as well as a lucrative tax base; an inner-city, low-income population 'marooned' within the American metropolis, thus lacking an adequate and reliable transportation system, social services, and housing; as well as the pressing demands of corporate interests and the transformation of racial politics from the upwards motion of grassroots politics and the downward pressure exerted by the nation's executive branch.

Nevertheless, formal politics cannot be compared with an abstract notion of what radical black American politics might entail, as it is simply too constrained by the rules of the formal political system and the necessities of bipartisan politics. Administrations governed by blacks are administrations nonetheless, and thus pressures to 'succeed' and to obtain an additional term in office already limit them.

On the other hand, many black-led administrations are not equivalent to others of the same ilk, simply as a consequence of the promise of social justice and racial equality that engaged black, and in many cases, Latino voters in the first instance. In this transformative moment in United States history where the civil rights legacy is confronted with the aggressive economic and humanitarian retrenchment of the Reagan Administration, black leaders have failed not only to advance the interests of black Americans, but also to protect the meagre gains produced by the momentum of the Civil

Rights Movement. Thus, black Americans are often victimised doubly within the context of these administrations: They are attacked economically and culturally by the government, and then betrayed politically by those they have chosen to elect into office. Therefore, many black Americans are essentially without representation and oppositionally defenceless in the formal political arena, as their vote had already been appropriated by these administrations; they are already 'spoken' for.

But to relinquish faith in the promise of liberalism and American democracy for black Americans is a sensitive topic indeed. This philosophy has motivated the civil rights struggles of the 19th century and beyond and has resounded with black populations worldwide, most notably in Toussaint L'Ouverture's appropriation of the French cry for *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* during the Haitian Revolution. This is in addition to the impact that the Civil Rights Movement itself has had from Northern Ireland to South Africa. So, to hastily cast liberalism aside and its entanglement with black civil rights history in the United States could be viewed as tantamount to historical irreverence for the legacy of civil rights as well as the destruction of a dream. This hesitancy has most recently manifested itself in the suspicion with which postmodernist and deconstructionist techniques have been viewed in the historical arena. Many ponder the possible injustices of dismissing and dismantling Enlightenment ideals precisely at the moment when the formerly colonised and enslaved are now laying claim to such ideals with greater and consistent urgency than ever before. However, while some of these critiques raise certain pertinent issues, they are not adequate justification to press forward blindly. To appropriate the poetic language of Langston Hughes, justice and full human equality for black Americans is a 'dream deferred'; this must not continue under the aegis of nostalgia.

Whether or not to cast liberalism aside is not the purpose of this chapter. Rather, the argument is that the grandness of liberal theory, its presumed universal humanism, has not been sufficiently questioned, partly because its adherents refuse to cast its founding assumptions into doubt. This refusal leads to an attempt to drown out dissenting or

questioning voices, black or otherwise. A sceptical distance with regard to liberalism should be maintained until liberal history is addressed in a critical fashion.

Additionally, what has resulted from the exegesis in this last section is the nature of the relationship that had been established between city officials, the neighbourhoods of Powelton Village and Cobbs Creek Park, and MOVE. As stated in *Chapter 1*, the precise details of the actions taken by individual social actors leading up to and during the 13 May 1985 tragedy are not the intended focus. The city did not maintain constant and effective communication from the initial stages of the conflict to those where decisive actions were planned in an attempt to ‘resolve’ the conflict. In both instances, conflict resolution fell by the wayside in favour of aggressive military tactics. The next chapters will consider the discourses impacting upon a historically situated understanding of the MOVE situation through the lens of the print news media. These discourses will be brought into relief to contribute to knowledge regarding black American social, political, and cultural moments of the 1970s and 1980s.

CHAPTER 4: DISCOURSE AND THE MEDIA

Methodological Issues

I. Introduction

‘News,’ in its multifarious forms, is ubiquitous in the world today, such that one does not question how events become news or achieve the quality of *newsworthiness*. Indeed, the public may be more literate in the forms of media communications, and therefore attuned to the presentation of the news. However, the institutionalisation of news production and the manner in which particular events are brought into focus has yet to receive its proper due. In other words, where does the production of value occur in the news-making process?

The production of news value, or newsworthiness, is obfuscated further by the appearance of choice in the free market. News has become a commodity in the Age of Information, in which one’s consumption of news can be tailored to personal preference. In its simplest form, individualised news is present in the division of newspapers into local, national, and international sections; while at an elevated level, it permits one to have articles written by one particular columnist sent directly to an email account or cellular telephone. Thus, news, which is considered to be of public nature in terms of its dissemination and consumption, has become privatised in the last few decades of the twentieth century by virtue of its increasing compartmentalisation.

Setting aside the preponderance of the news for the moment allows for the appreciation of the limitations imposed upon the majority of news outlets, particularly those in the mainstream. An abundance of choices are present superficially, but what about the actual content? Regardless of the means of news transmission, most outlets continue to employ the same sources in ferreting out current events. There is undoubtedly a routine in news production that contributes to similarities between competing businesses in all areas of the news media.

Consequently, there is no ontology for 'news,' or anything particular that can be affirmed as 'news' *per se*. It is a categorical distinction that is also a discourse, proffering an understanding of certain events that take place in the world. Therefore, 'the news' delineates the occurrence of significant events from others according to an abstracted formulation.¹

Establishing the newsworthiness of an event subsequently rests upon an established conceptual framework by which the public is prompted to make sense of the world. Take, for example, the aforementioned division between local, national, and international affairs. These categories have become naturalised in the newspaper industry, meaning that their presence is presumed to be part of a given order of things, logical, and largely unquestioned. The average reader would not consider why the production editor has placed an item in the local section rather than the national section, although the piece may have equal relevance for both categories. Organising and sequencing events in this fashion is not necessarily negative, for individuals employ categories to make sense of the world; however, this does not preclude the need to question the impetus and politics behind such organisation as well as its effect on the production and consumption of knowledge.

Categorisation within a newspaper also ensures consistency from day to day readings. The paper must retain recognisable elements, by perpetuating particular linguistic patterns, interest columns, formatted layouts, and overall style, such that its audience develops a sense of ownership over the paper. In other words, there are discernible elements that coalesce to resemble entities called *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, or *The Guardian*. This consistency offers security for the reader in knowing how to read the paper and what to expect in terms of its content and tone, thereby inspiring loyalty and familiarity on behalf of its audience.

¹ Hall, *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978), p. 53.

However, the possibility of tension arises in times of social upheaval and change whereby the newspaper must decide whether to continue along its previous lines of thought and pattern, or to disrupt it. During such moments, the audience may experience greater motivation to question the value of the newspaper in terms of its changing needs. Does the press succeed in interpreting complicated and unpredictable events in the world, or will the individual and society fare better by exiting its framework and discourse? This remains a guide for the ensuing media analysis.

In grappling with the significance of MOVE and a consideration of black American politics and community, the media presents an investigative avenue hitherto unexplored systematically.² The media coverage during sustained periods of the group's activity reveals inconsistencies between the actuality of the political options available to the residents of Osage Avenue, and the official rhetoric regarding equal access to the political process for minority constituencies.

The bulk of media involvement coincided with 13 May 1985, the day on which eleven MOVE members died in a confrontation with the Philadelphia Police and Fire Departments. These events also initiated a period of displacement, homelessness, and despair for Cobbs Creek Park residents whose homes were destroyed or damaged in the fire consuming two city blocks of predominantly black-owned homes.

However, the disregard evidenced by papers to localised conflicts in their formative stages, as is the case with MOVE, speaks to the problematic of news 'events.'³ The preoccupation with the grand extremities of human existence is a prominent characteristic of the news-making process. The production of news is designed to

² Suzanne Ife Williams notes that the media is the principal source of information regarding MOVE. See "Police Brutality: Case Study of Philadelphia/MOVE," (PhD diss., Dept. of Political Science, Atlanta University, July 1988), pp. 13-14.

³ John Fiske states: "The term *media event* is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between a "real" event and its mediated representation. Consequently, we can no longer work with the idea that the "real" is more important, significant or even "true" than the representation. A media event, then is not a mere representation of what happened, but it has its own reality, which gathers itself up into the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it." See *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 2.

simultaneously shock the consumer with the horror and beauty of the human condition, while reinterpreting these events to make them palatable to those desiring drama, yet requiring consistency in order to sustain the activities of everyday life. In the main, the dramatic and the extreme, particularly on a grand scale, take place 'elsewhere,' removed from the immediate spheres of the consumer's social interaction. But how does one cope with these events when they occur in the same locale as oneself? How does the media facilitate the balance between the penchant for the extreme and the need for security at home?

The ability of Philadelphian news conglomerates to engage and interpret destructive events in its locale constitutes the focus of the next three chapters.⁴ In this chapter, media/communication theory will be explored in order to provide a sufficient framework within which to address the media and its relation to the MOVE situation. Justification regarding the qualitative methodology chosen for the media analysis is the principal agendum, followed by the selection of media materials.

II. Methods and Approaches to Media Analysis

In addressing the ability of the press to interpret events in a changing world, the analytical technique that one adopts is of utmost significance. There are many methods available for the analysis of media, and the ones pertinent to print newspapers will be considered here. Along with the practical considerations bearing upon a selected method are those of a philosophical or corresponding *methodological* nature, an issue to which we will return in brief.⁵ The project undertaken here will aim to achieve the integrated nature of qualitative

⁴ The print news media, or newspapers, are the principal materials under consideration.

⁵ Perhaps an acknowledgement of the training undertaken in the course of my doctoral degree will be useful for the reader. A course in the philosophy of social sciences contributed to the *methodological* issues entertained here, whereas separate courses in quantitative and qualitative methods were instructive in considering specific 'scientific' techniques and methods, and connecting these with various philosophies or methodologies. Another course addressing the overall research design and doctoral process served to connect these various elements together, thus facilitating a comprehensive view of the doctoral project.

media studies, thus emphasising the *process* of meaning production and the historical situatedness of the defined problematic.

Generally, the adopted method resides under the umbrella of *discourse analysis*. Discourse analysis can encompass micro-linguistic methods such as talk analysis and content analysis, to macro-linguistic methods such as literary analysis. However, not all of these claim qualitative foundations. Before addressing the particularities of each method, it should be stated that within media studies, the division of labour in researching different mediums often is conceptualised as a three-step cycle. The first concerns the structure of the news industry including the ownership of media outlets, and the institutions that govern the transmission of media material. The second step involves the actual transmission of media forms and the routines of media production. The third step consists of analysing the reception of media, or the study of 'audiences.' Different analytical techniques often correspond to a particular stage in the cycle. The second step is the one most fully elucidated in this study, that which is preoccupied with the transmission of discourses and the creation of news events.

Two of the most utilised techniques in an analysis of newspapers will be discussed briefly for comparative purposes: They are content analysis and the study of audiences, or audience ethnography. *Content analysis* is a prominent technique in media studies, and the proponents thereof often lay claim to scientific empiricism and objectivity. In content analysis, the researcher selects a discrete component of the media message, whether written, visual or spoken, to quantify within a limited framework; thus it is often a study of comparisons and patterns. Therefore, content analysis works best in addressing large quantities of material, so as to have an adequate sample with which to map the occurrence and recurrence of a particular media component. The claim to empiricism on behalf of content analysis rests upon its presumed comprehensiveness and non-selectivity.⁶

⁶ John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990/1982), p. 136. Content analysis is strongly associated with Max Weber and his studies of German politics in

Due to the magnitude of content analytical studies, the research question tends to be straightforward and blunt, thus it is most effective in making strong pronouncements about one element of the media industry where scope and breadth are favoured. Content analysis does offer context, or the opportunity to situate the data in the social, historical, and political climate in which the data has been produced; without minimal context, of course, the data would be rendered unintelligible, but this is neither the primary objective nor the driving imperative behind such studies.

There are divisions within content analysis, which can be collapsed into the broad categories of *conceptual* and *relational* analysis. Conceptual analysis adheres to the basic principle of quantification as described above. Relational analysis, which aims to establish relations between concepts, thus fosters a more context-driven investigation. However, the further one ventures into the territory of 'context,' the further removed one becomes from the empirical basis of the method.

Relational content analysis is a successor of *semiotics*, which is a form of linguistic analysis most readily associated with Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotics also focuses upon the internal structure of the text and suffers from the stereotypical textual determinism linked to content analysis. Stuart Hall, who attempted to draw critical attention to the reader in contrast to the insular, textual world of semiotics, restructured Saussure's semiotic model. Hall's model, termed 'encoding-decoding,' initiated a new direction in communication media studies with a focus on the audience, thus providing a useful segue into the next method.⁷

In responding to the perceived statistical sterility of content analysis and the dominance of textual data, communications researchers sought to assess the interplay

the media, as well as Harold Laswell and his work on wartime propaganda in the United States. More recent studies include Ben Hunt's *Getting to war* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner, eds., *Politics as talk and text* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002).

⁷ Hall, "Encoding/decoding," pp. 128-138 in Hall, ed., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* (London: Hutchinson, 1980/1973). For a popular study in decoding, see Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Marion Boyers, Ltd., 1994/1978).

between the text and the 'real-world' experience by those it targets: the audience. The method of analysing the reception of media messages by sampling a defined audience is termed *audience ethnography*. This method is akin to anthropology in analysing the cultural habits and attitudes of audience members. Therefore, the researcher engages in secondary techniques such as participant observation of focus groups, interviews, and other activities that encourage personal proximity with the subject of his or her study.

The researcher selects individuals with knowledge of the media message under consideration, such as a novel or a film, or individuals may be selected to view a sitcom, and then discuss the programme in focus groups. Fiske suggests that audience ethnographies provide insight into the ways in which particular audiences subvert, conform to, or completely transform the texts that are put to them, revealing that alternative texts are 'negotiated' in the moment that the reader/viewer/listener apprehends or encodes that text.⁸

The anthropological nature of audience ethnography results in research benefits that are unavailable to techniques neglecting the reception process, but it also exhibits significant drawbacks. It is viewed as sociology conducted 'on the ground,' but Fiske notes that this introduces two new problems.⁹ The first involves the role of the investigator: Does the researcher treat his/her own presence as part of the ethnographic group at hand, or are they objectively removed from the project? Depending upon the investigator's own subjective account of his/her location within the project as either insider/outsider or some combination thereof, the results garnered from an ethnographic project will differ. An involved researcher will most likely accrue personal insights into the lives of their subjects, whereas a distanced researcher will not achieve this kind of intimate rapport. The second problem involves the layering of interpretation that takes place in an ethnographic setting. Not only is the text interpreted, but also the audience's

⁸ Fiske, *Introduction*, p. 159.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

interpretation of that text.¹⁰ Thus audience ethnography “provide[s] us with instances of communication in process” not an objective social category to which we can ascribe various communicative tendencies.¹¹

Audience ethnography counters the empirical claims of content analysis by shifting the focus to the third step of the media ‘cycle,’ that of reception. This is the stage at which the ‘work’ of the text can be seen to operate most directly, when it intersects with the psychologies of individual audience members. Therefore, the information obtained via audience ethnography can substantiate theoretical claims, but the “audiences studied are not, as empiricism demands, representative of an objective social category, and the meanings they produce cannot be generalized out to that category as a whole.”¹²

A. Critical Discourse Analysis

The technique of *critical discourse analysis* offers the communications researcher a middle way between the empiricism of content analysis and the intimate situatedness of audience ethnography.¹³ Due to certain limiting elements of the media analysis to be undertaken and its place within the larger framework of the thesis, critical discourse analysis is the chosen method.

¹⁰ Virginia Nightingale describes the ethnographic process as akin to translation. See her *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real* (London: Routledge, 1996), spec. Ch. 6: ‘Cultural Translation,’ pp. 107-125.

¹¹ One of the most influential audience ethnographies is the two-part *Nationwide* study conducted by David Morley and Charlotte Brunson. See *Everyday Television: ‘Nationwide’* (London: BFI, 1978); and Morley’s *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience: structure and decoding* (London: BFI, 1980). The latter of the two studies risks essentialising the social categories used by reducing the complex and sometimes contradictory responses of the focus groups to effects of their class position, a legacy of Hall’s ‘encoding-decoding’ model. Studies which engage the full complexity of audience responses more so than Morley’s include Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally’s *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992); Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: women, patriarchy and popular literature* (Chapel Hill: University of California Press, 1984); and Hunt’s *Screening the Los Angeles “riots”: Race, Seeing, and Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹² Fiske, *Introduction*, p. 162.

¹³ The critical discourse analysis advocated in this study should not be confused with a method of the same name, referred to by the acronym CDA. CDA resounds with the relational variant of content analysis, and is concerned with the ‘cognitive mapping’ of concepts through the isolation of particular terms. A predominant scholar in this area is Norman Fairclough. See his *Language and Power* (London: Longman Press, 1989).

Critical discourse analysis references the tradition associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England. Cultural studies, in this tradition, has poached techniques and strategies from disciplines such as literature, psychology, sociology, philosophy, as well as from specific theoretical paradigms such as Marxism and Freudianism, in order to analyse cultural practice in the milieu of economic and political power. However, CCCS is not the sole tradition from which material is drawn. Recent interventions in the arena of cultural studies have introduced, with additional complexity, analyses of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, thereby contesting the latent economic determinism within early cultural studies projects.

The 'discourse' in critical discourse analysis is contentious in its own right and has been the object of intense intellectual debate. Michel Foucault's model of discourse is the most instructive for this study, as he brings to the fore the relationship between knowledge and power (written as such: power/knowledge). The quest for knowledge often presents itself as free from the constraints of authority, as objective in the search for 'truth.' However, disciplines are inevitably constrained and thus serve to reproduce, maintain, or configure new power structures.¹⁴ There are many renderings of discourse, but the concept of power/knowledge differentiates it significantly from others.

The basic definition of 'discourse' stems from linguistics designating a series of statements combined to produce meaning. Foucault's oeuvre has served to expand this basic concept into an overarching (some critics would assert that it is indeed totalising) theory about how statements function to organise knowledge of the world. Foucault focuses on the human and social sciences, those disciplines that operate to 'subject' the individual to rules and regulations, thus configuring them as *subjects*. As such, the

¹⁴ Foucault states: "Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. [...] We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (1977), (New York: Vintage, 1995/1975), pp. 27-28.

individual is disciplined effectively into conducting himself or herself according to the prevailing tendencies of a particular historical period. In Foucault's account, power is not consigned to one individual or entity concretely; rather it is diffuse and pervasive.

Conceding the diffuse nature of power does not preclude recognising acts or systems of oppression, as the point is to establish the ways in which individuals are micro-managed and subject to discipline in seemingly minor and inconsequential ways. Conceiving of power in its multifarious permutations also acknowledges the possibilities for resistance against power. As power is present in the mundane as well as in the grandiose, resistance is possible in minor acts and struggles. In other words, power is neither total nor absolute.¹⁵

Thus discourses (e.g. sexual or racial discourses) provide a certain way of approaching their subjects of discussion (sexuality and race) and accord authority to particular institutions or individuals to speak about them in society (psychiatrists and sociologists); the prescience of this argument is evident in *Chapter 2* in considering sociology and the 'pathology' of the black family.¹⁶ For Foucault, sexuality and race cannot exist objectively, and they are not temporally constant variables; they attain meaning only within a particular historical context. From these institutions and individuals flow regulations and pronouncements about 'normal' sexual conduct or the superiority/inferiority of one race in relation to another. These discourses are historically rooted and transform themselves through time (not necessarily continuously or progressively so), and are responsive to resistance or challenges to their authority, thus

¹⁵ Rejecting the absoluteness or totality of power is instructive for those who would hail the success of revolutions or an 'inversion of power relations.' As power is never absolute, neither is its inversion, thus requiring a more subtle understanding of the processes of social change. Cultural studies projects, in contending with the post-structuralist onslaught, have often appropriated this diffuse notion of power and applied it to theories of 'resistance' such that resistance is in every cultural practice and inevitable. Partially, this results from a lack of clarity in Foucault's account of differing forms of power, specifically the distinction between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' deployments of power. In these overstatements of resistance, progressive politics often is seen as resulting from intervening in the realm of discourse or formulating a counterdiscourse, while abdicating the need for practical politics.

¹⁶ See Ch. 2, pp. 33-42.

producing counterdiscourses. The combination of discourses and counterdiscourses constitute a *discursive formation*.

In analysing the media material on the MOVE conflict, discourses on blackness, community, normality/abnormality, criminality, and terrorism will feature significantly. Critical discourse analysis, in contrast to content analysis, requires close readings of the media material in conjunction with a specific socio-historical and cultural context.¹⁷ It requires a directed interest in recognising who or what institutions are represented in the media, and how they impact upon the creation of news stories. Before moving on to establish critical discourse analysis as appropriate to research on MOVE, further clarification as to why audience ethnography or content analysis have not been selected is necessary.

While recurrence and patterning are indicators of significance in content analytical studies, critical discourse analytical studies establish the significance of the media material or message predominantly *in relation to* the context in which it was produced and subsequently circulated. In this study, often it is not the recurrence of terminology but its location and timing that is at stake. Literary modes of interpretation are prevalent in critical discourse analysis due to the emphasis on the form of the media message as well as its content. Unlike content analysis, a critical discourse analysis reveals the conscious selectivity of the researcher in choosing the media messages to be emphasised and analysed in detail. Depth rather than breadth receives privilege in order to make the social significance of a particular media message resonate, an objective that is part and parcel of this study's overarching objective.¹⁸

On the other hand, audience ethnography will not supplement or replace critical discourse analysis due to both methodological and practical reasons. Audience

¹⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3; Fiske, *Media Matters*, p. 3.

¹⁸ However, even those studies that focus on discursive or symbolic power often neglect this context. One prominent example is Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Herts: Paladin, 1973/1972), in which there is little account of British politics impacting upon moral panics involving 'youth.'

ethnography is predominantly utilised to establish or refute the existence of community in the context of consuming and reproducing media information.¹⁹ Community is created in the act of reading a novel or watching a soap opera, or it may pre-exist the consumption of media materials by virtue of race, religious affiliation, or gender. As this study is partly preoccupied with the issue of community, specifically the construction of black community, audience ethnography appears to be a suitable methodological option. However, as this project is at least twenty years removed from the major events in the history of MOVE, audience ethnography is untenable. An ethnographic project in this instance would require the immersion of individuals in media materials and an historical setting unfamiliar and temporally removed from them. In this instance, ethnography would be doomed to inefficacy due to the temporal (and cultural) distance from the material and a somewhat disingenuous attempt to recreate a reading community. In consideration of the inadequacy of content analysis for the objectives of this project and the practical difficulties of ethnographic study, critical discourse analysis is relevant for both practical and methodological reasons. The methodological choices for this study, however, do not preclude recognition of the fruitful combination of methods available in other studies.

B. Relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis for MOVE

As discussed above, critical discourse analysis permits media materials to be contextualised through the historical, social, cultural, and political factors at play during its production and circulation²⁰; therefore, it facilitates the connection of a media case study with the larger imperative of this thesis: MOVE's role in illuminating the

¹⁹ Nightingale highlighted 'community' as a crucial theme and prevalent discourse (although often understated) in audience ethnographies. See *Studying Audiences*.

²⁰ Fiske perceives a media event as a "point of maximum discursive visibility" as well as discursive struggle. Therefore, a media analysis offers an opportunity to consider the coagulation of prevailing public discourses in this time period around the MOVE event. See his *Media Matters*.

construction and management of black American politics.²¹ Thus, the media analysis is not an end in itself or the dominating element of the study; rather, it contributes to the aforementioned objective and furthers the theoretical motivations expressed in *Chapters 2* and *3*.

One of the potential drawbacks in combining the study of media with racial considerations is the relegation of one or the other to a subordinate role; most likely it is the process of racialisation, often resulting from a third element: class. The dominance of class is prevalent due to the history of the disciplines involved. Cultural studies, particularly the CCCS tradition, drew theoretical impetus from varieties of Marxism including the figures of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and the Frankfurt School, thus leading to the elevation of class status as that which is most significant.²² Additionally, the early media studies emerging from the CCCS tended to focus on the influence that class position wielded over readings of media materials by audience members; race was present in these analyses, but it was not accorded a complex reading by media researchers.²³ Across the Atlantic in the United States, media analyses, emerging from the Chicago School for example, also reduced the effects of racialisation to class subordination. Darnell Hunt explains:

It is hardly accidental that researchers working with the Critical Media Studies tradition rarely center race in their analyses. After all, Critical Media Studies grows out of a Marxist theoretical tradition whose main current has tended to treat race as epiphenomenal. Many of the more orthodox proponents of this tradition even understand racial consciousness as “false consciousness,” identifying class, instead, as the fundamental analytical category for understanding societal relations.²⁴

²¹ Otto Santa Ana states: “What makes discourse analysis critical is its focus on real-world problems of injustice, rather than on theoretical issues of discourse that only incidentally involve issues of social concern.” Additionally, Santa Ana notes that critical discourse analysis eschews positivism, or an empirical scientific character as a consequence of this preoccupation. See *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 16. See also Kellner, *Media Culture*, p. 198.

²² I do not intend to diminish the significance of class here, as certainly a ‘recovery’ of class issues in sociological analyses of culture, and particularly that of the working-class, is one of the hallmarks of the British cultural studies tradition. This concern with the ‘non-elite’ or ‘dominated classes’ of British society helped to pave the way for explorations into other modes of domination other than that of class.

²³ For example, *Policing the Crisis* (Hall, *et al.*) is one of the most extensive media studies with its analysis of the phenomenon of ‘mugging,’ but a serious involvement with race is absent from an otherwise monumentally detailed effort.

²⁴ Hunt, *Screening the Los Angeles “riots,”* p. 4. Hunt notes that his use of the term ‘Critical Media Studies’ is general for the purposes of discussion and represents an ‘ideal type’; it is based

Rejecting the economic determinism referenced by Hunt also complicates attempts to present the media as simplistically 'reflecting' the interests of a specific class fraction. The communication process is much more complex than transmitting a false consciousness, although this does not rule out the media's role in forming public opinion.²⁵

Pursuing critical discourse analysis encourages the integration of media materials with the key elements elucidated thus far: a concern with blackness as an theoretical issue, the political mobilisation of black Americans, and the construction of MOVE and its members as that which is 'other' to the normality of the American citizen. Also of consequence is the prevalence of racism through other, seemingly unrelated discourses.²⁶ Therefore, the preceding chapters map out the context of the discourses that will be analysed. The media analysis will provide an opportunity to consider the discourses interacting with one another, thus considering the 'work' that such discourses perform in

on the Birmingham School. He also asserts that it is to be differentiated from more traditional media studies by its "progressive political agenda" coupled with "its theoretical one" although its progressive aims are marred somewhat by marginalising racial issues in favour of those pertaining to class. With regard to the Sociology of Race tradition, Hunt also adds that it has tended to discount the media as significantly impacting understandings of 'race,' a bias descending from mainstream sociology.

²⁵ Indeed, van Dijk notes that "the press does not passively participate in the reproduction of power" and actually assists in its own sustenance through the redefinition and framing of public discourse. See *Racism and the Press: Critical Studies in Racism and Migration* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 42. With the invocation of false consciousness arises the problem of ideology in relation to discourse. Some have renounced ideology altogether, as in its simplest form, it references something akin to 'the truth'; therefore one must presume to stand outside of it in order to critique it, and is thus immune to ideological influence. I do not consider the two terms to be that distanced from one another (although their corresponding theoretical paradigms may claim to be), but rather consider a theory of discourse as an intervention in the necessary correlation between economic positions and class ideologies. However, in briefly neglecting its economic determinism, ideology also references the 'power' behind systems of belief. Discourse, in a convoluted manner, concedes the subject more accountability than ideology, as a demystification of power relations does not automatically lead to revolutionary consciousness, as is implied by ideology.

²⁶ This point is taken from Wetherell and Potter who claim: "Even relatively blatant fascist propaganda and blatant advocates of racism (such as Le Pen in France) have learnt to modify their discourse so that on some occasions racism can occur without biological categorization and the more familiar paraphernalia of 'advanced' and 'primitive', 'negative' and 'positive', 'superior' and 'inferior' distinctions. [...] There is the danger of being silenced when racist discourse continues to oppress but no longer meets the main characterizations of social scientific definitions of racism." They utilise the term 'sanitary coding' to describe this situation. See *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 71-72.

constructing knowledge about MOVE. A complete account of discourses is not possible, but the aim is to draw out small strains of those that impact upon an understanding of the way in which black Americans are permitted to participate in American society. The objective is not simply to demonstrate the effects of the media on the public, but rather to grapple with the complexity of discourses with which the media must interpret for its constituency, and the difficulty of maintaining this strained posture in times of local crisis or imminent social change.

III. Specifics of the Media Analysis

Within the next three chapters, the analysis of three local Philadelphian newspapers will be undertaken. Other media materials will be integrated, according to relevance, as well as information from previous studies on MOVE, in order to demonstrate and augment the significance of the discourses enveloping the MOVE situation.

A. The Philadelphian Newspapers

The Philadelphia Inquirer was founded 1 June 1829, and constitutes Philadelphia's largest newspaper. It is said to be the nation's largest surviving daily paper in taking account of the mergers and takeovers prominent in the paper's history. It is circulated throughout the state of Pennsylvania and sections of southern New Jersey. One edition covers the metropolitan area of Philadelphia and surrounding suburbs, while the others cover eight counties in both southern New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Its motto, 'Its How You Know,' attests to its prominent position on the local and national media scenes. *The Inquirer* has significant international news coverage; however, in comparison to *The New York Times*—which has ample international affairs commentary and reporting—*The Inquirer's* coverage demonstrates a lack of depth and continuity in covering international

issues. *The Inquirer* is put forth as a liberal paper, thus its formal style and claims to objectivity reveal this political stance.

The Daily News was founded 31 March 1925 and is most easily aligned with the 'tabloid' paper. Unlike *The Inquirer*, its focus is less on formal news, and more attention is drawn to local sports issues and the city's scandalous affairs. *The Daily News* presents itself as the friendly paper—that which will eliminate unnecessary items in order to focus on relevant local issues. There is a paucity of international news stories and columns; when international events are reported, they occur typically when relevancy to a large national or local issue is obvious and immediate. Although less conservative in style and format than *The Inquirer*, *The Daily News* espouses conservative rhetoric.²⁷

Founded in 1884 by Chris J. Perry, Sr., *The Philadelphia Tribune*, a semi-weekly, is one of the oldest black American newspapers in the United States. The paper was overtaken by E. Washington Rhodes (one of Perry's son-in-laws) and thereafter designed to address the needs and interests of Philadelphia's working-class black population. "Rhodes had taken a decided position about the black race, singling out what he called 'affluent middle-class Negroes' because they did not in his opinion do enough to help the poor."²⁸ Furthermore, Rhodes "believed that such newspapers should crusade for black rights and set up various programmes of aid to blacks in the Philadelphia area."²⁹ Thus, *The Philadelphia Tribune* has an explicit intent to support forms of social welfare for Philadelphia's impoverished black citizens. Wolseley notes that the somewhat haphazard format of the paper results from the paper's openness to publishing commentary as well as requests for community help by individual citizens. It is also a member of the National

²⁷ Regarding ownership, Knight Newspapers, Inc. acquired both *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Philadelphia Daily News* in 1969; shortly thereafter, John S. Knight formed a subsidy, Philadelphia Newspapers, Inc., to operate the two papers. Knight Newspapers, Inc. merged with Ridder Publishers in 1974 to form Knight-Ridder, one of the largest publishing corporations in the United States.

²⁸ Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), otherwise known as the Black Press of America.³⁰

The combination of these three newspapers provides interesting points of comparison in examining the way that MOVE was constructed in the media for various audiences or constituencies in the city of Philadelphia. One might expect that *The Inquirer* would strive for explicitly detached, objective, and impartial coverage of the MOVE situation, while *The Daily News* would augment the spectacular and the obscene in order to maintain its image as 'the people's tabloid.' *The Tribune* is cut from different cloth than that of the previous two papers due to its explicit aim to support and encourage social welfare for black Americans in the Philadelphia area, and, furthermore, to elicit specific support from within the community. Therefore, its constituency is a racialised one, and the objective is not simply to report the news en masse, but to selectively construct news relevant to the black American community.

The selected time period to be covered in the analysis of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Philadelphia Tribune*, and *The Philadelphia Daily News* begins August 1984 and ends August 1985. 1978 would have also provided an ideal date to examine the news coverage on MOVE, as this is when the group emerged into public view; however, archival material from the 1970s is inconsistent and incomplete.³¹ Nevertheless, August 1984 is also a crucial starting date to begin examining news coverage of MOVE as the city government was anticipating a confrontation with MOVE on the anniversary of the Powelton Village siege. The analysis of the media materials will be carried through until August 1985, so that the aftermath of the 13 May 1985 conflagration and the ensuing rebuilding process are taken into account. As previously stated, additional reportage will

³⁰ The NNPA is sixty-two year old federation of approximately two hundred community newspapers serving black communities in the United States.

³¹ A notable example of newspaper coverage prior to 1978 is a weekly column in *The Tribune* authored by MOVE, explaining its philosophy after initially protesting the paper's unfair coverage. Titled 'On the MOVE,' and beginning June 1975, each feature was principally a variation on a theme of MOVE's anti-systemic perspective.

be integrated into the study, however, limitations upon the material are in place in order to facilitate a degree of systematic examination.

B. Limiting Factors of the Media Analysis

Originally, this study endeavoured to undertake a comparative media analysis of print news coverage, television, and radio broadcasts. However, for reasons of availability, economic viability, and consistency, the last two media forms were excluded, and an analysis thereof would have been haphazard and problematic. Specifically, a number of videocassettes of the development of the Osage Avenue conflagration during the month of May 1985 that were available for public usage (through Philadelphian libraries, etc.) were either destroyed or missing when actually located.³² Those that remained intact were often subject to restrictive access in the case of media conglomerates, or the costs incurred in the process of viewing or listening to video and audiocassettes were extremely prohibitive. Thus, one important absence in the present media analysis is a consideration of the moving image.³³ Nonetheless, newspapers became the sole focus of the media analysis, enabling an examination of news materials within an extended time frame and with increased consistency.

In addition to the concerns regarding the availability and accessibility of non-print media materials, there are a number of other unanticipated factors that have constrained a 'reading' of the selected sample of newspaper articles. As the media study here is being conducted after the fact, reading the newspaper *as such*, as a material, physical newspaper has been rendered impossible. Access to the newspaper articles has been achieved through a combination of archival microfilm viewings, leading to

³² However, the consequences of witnessing the conflagration through live television broadcasts would have presented an ideal ethnographic study, if conducted within a reasonable time frame after the event.

³³ Of particular import for this study of MOVE is the representation of blackness or black identity, as discussed in *Chapter 2*; thus *visually* assessing the news coverage could have impacted significantly upon an analysis of racial discourses characterising this event.

subsequent photocopying of some material, archival articles provided on the Internet, as well as acquiring some materials purely through reproductive copies. Hence, there is a degree of remove from the traditional practice of newspaper reading. The research methodology employed here contrasts with the majority of media studies that have been undertaken, as the researchers either have developed their research projects in the midst of the events taking place, or shortly thereafter.

The distancing from the traditional physical newspaper form leads to a number of subsidiary consequences. Firstly, with respect to the articles garnered from the Internet, one is disabled from visually examining the newspaper as a whole.³⁴ Access is permitted only for the articles requested. Acquiring articles in this manner obscures the arrangement of the articles on the page as well as the overall layout. Noting the various layout elements contributes to comprehending the importance accorded to selected newspaper items. Nonetheless, viewing the physical newspaper presentation on microfilm has helped to counter the 'blindness' of viewing archival material on the Internet even though accounting for the positioning of each article is not possible.

Secondly, searching for archival media materials has a higher margin of error than that of the practice of pruning articles from a physical newspaper on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps, accounting for every relevant article on a topic is more problematic for a content analytical study, as the intention of the research rests in quantification. However, where possible, microfilm materials have been scanned more than once, and in the case of Internet archives, a number of keyword entries have been selected in order to maximise availability and the thoroughness of the research.

The limitations elucidated above should not significantly detract from the overall impact and import of this media case study, principally for the reason that the emphasis here is upon drawing out the interacting discourses and the way in which they work to

³⁴ It is important to stress that archival newspaper material provided on the Internet is the focus here, not the Internet editions that are commonplace today. A consideration of the Internet newspaper form exploring the effects on reading produced by the myriad linkages to other websites, advertisements, and animated images has significantly altered the analysis of the news medium.

structure a particular reading of the MOVE situation. Conceivably, the outlined limitations are of consequence more so for the researcher's personal ability to grasp the temporal frame of the 1980s and the presence of the newspaper medium within this frame, than for the results that this study might yield. However, the researcher is not in a position to evaluate the complete fallout of these limitations, as this is the province of others.

IV. Summary

The media analysis on the MOVE situation in the 1980s seeks to demonstrate the nuances of the media's coping strategy with regard to localised social change. In selecting three different genres of newspaper, the particular manifestations of the discourses theoretically mapped out in the preceding chapters will be addressed. These genres provide an opportunity for comparing and contrasting differing reportage styles and ascertaining whether this impacts upon the management of the discourses relevant to the MOVE situation. By adopting critical discourse analysis as the approach with which to engage the media materials, one is enabled to link the media to the broader historical and socio-political context. Indeed, there is the opportunity to examine how the MOVE situation was constructed as 'news' in the first instance, and, furthermore, to assess how the local press balances the desire for dramatisation while expressing sensitivity to local conflict.

CHAPTER 5: DEFINING DISCOURSES

War and Terrorism

The power to define violence and project its lessons, including stigmatization, demonization and the selective labelling of terror and terrorists, is the chief cultural requirement for social control.
—George Gerbner, “Violence and Terror in and by the Media”

I. *Introduction*

Prior to May 1985, the media’s coverage on MOVE was minimal. Although residents consistently agitated for action, no active notice was taken of their protests. This inattentiveness to a local issue with a significant and volatile history was the declared course of action on behalf of the Goode Administration.

In this chapter, the official silence enveloping the vicinity of Osage Avenue will constitute a focal point. Of consequence will be the sustained disregard demonstrated by the city administration to its constituents. Following through with this line of inquiry, we must question the degree to which the involvement of the media in this localised situation correlates with that evidenced by the city administration. Did any of the newspapers demonstrate a greater degree of independence from the city than the others by challenging the parameters established by the local government? In light of this query, not only is the content and context of the news coverage at issue, but also the ways the newspapers came to apprehend the situation as newsworthy for the Philadelphia reading public.

Additionally, two discourses readily emerged to define the MOVE situation as a newsworthy product: terrorism and war. Through the mobilisation of these internationalist frameworks, MOVE’s threat was amplified, thus encouraging a heightened level of state intervention. Therefore, the process of defining MOVE as a threatening and volatile menace occupied a pivotal role in the development of this conflict.¹

¹ Kellner defines this process as ‘negative framing’ and identifies it as an act of ‘demonisation’ that rules out diplomatic solutions. Kellner’s own analysis centres on the media’s portrayal of the first Gulf War. See *Media Culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics between the modern and the postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 207-208.

II. *Defining MOVE*

In *Chapter 1*, it was stated that much has been made of MOVE as a social entity. Were they the initiators of an urban social movement, the faltering tail end of an existing movement, terrorists, or simply geographically and ideologically misplaced environmentalists?² This oscillation between competing and overlapping definitions is exhibited also in the newspaper coverage. The previous chapters suggest that the issue of definition is more than semantic play. How MOVE is labelled influences the public's regard for its members. It also impacts upon the spaces made available to MOVE, discursively, to put forth its position and demands to others.

In consideration of the news coverage commencing May 1985, none of the newspapers in question had identified the situation on Osage Avenue as newsworthy. The media did not establish the story on MOVE; rather, it was the residents on MOVE's block that attracted media attention by holding a news conference in a local community centre on 1 May 1985. The MOVE situation did not attain newsworthiness until the possibility of action on behalf of the city administration became manifest.³

Therefore, the conflict did not enter *The Philadelphia Inquirer* until 2 May 1985 ('MOVE house stirs neighbors' anger'). *The Philadelphia Daily News* caught wind of the conference as the Osage Avenue residents were organising it and published a piece on 30 April 1985 ('Neighbors in moves against MOVE'). The publication of these two articles represents the early stages of establishing the MOVE situation as a feature item in the Philadelphia papers. *The Philadelphia Tribune* published its first piece on 3 May ('Make

² See, for example, Wagner-Pacifici's second chapter entitled 'What Is MOVE?' in *Discourse and Destruction: The City of Philadelphia versus MOVE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ This remains the assumption although the Philadelphia Police Department maintained an undercover/plainclothes police operation in the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood, which was coupled with the persistent efforts by both MOVE members and Osage Avenue residents to resolve the lifestyle issues between them, as evidenced in Assefa and Warhaftig's study on conflict resolution efforts. Therefore, 'action' was indeed taking place, but remained beneath the purview of the media radar due to its lack of overt aggressiveness; as a consequence, there was negligible coverage of the conflict leading into May 1985.

MOVE move, neighbors plead').⁴ During this formative period, MOVE was referred to as a 'radical, back-to-nature' group whose presence in the neighbourhood was problematic due to lifestyle differences.

In the early stages of coverage, the situation was subdivided into three separate conflicts. Firstly, MOVE and some of its neighbours clashed over lifestyle and privacy issues. Secondly, these residents differed with the city administration regarding resolution possibilities. The third conflict, emerging from MOVE's comments to the newspapers, is between MOVE and the Goode Administration. This conflict centres on Goode's inaction regarding the imprisonment of MOVE members following the Powelton Village confrontation. Take, for example, an excerpt from *The Inquirer* dated 2 May 1985 ('MOVE house stirs neighbors' anger') in which MOVE explains the continued harassment of its neighbours:

A MOVE spokeswoman, Ramona Africa, yesterday came out of the house and read a statement that she said was from MOVE founder John Africa. [...]

"We are going to victimize the mayor with his own policies," the spokeswoman said, calling for the release of imprisoned MOVE members.

According to Ramona Africa—MOVE's designated 'Minister of Information'—the harassment of the Osage residents constituted a direct attempt to gain the attention of both the city administration and the news media. The plight of the imprisoned MOVE members was relegated quite clearly to the realm of 'old' news. No longer embroiled in the drama of public interest, this affair was unsuitable for sustained coverage throughout the ensuing decade, nor was it reviewed in depth at this stage to further understanding of the continuing conflict. From MOVE's standpoint however, a substantial degree of public interest in their previous interactions with the Rizzo Administration was necessary in order to increase the pressure on Goode. This pressure would inspire a review of the 1978 case, possibly leading to the release of their imprisoned group members.

⁴ However, the biweekly publication of this paper, on Tuesdays and Fridays, must be kept in mind when considering the timeliness of its news reporting.

A. *Summoning Terrorism*

In place of a substantive review of past events, the news media utilised terminology that efficiently encapsulated the conflicts between the three parties involved and the power relations between them. The discourse adopted to describe these interlocking relationships was that of *terrorism*, which, in its deployment, affixed the role of terrorist to MOVE's position in the three sets of relations. In this configuration, the residents were relegated to the role of victims, and the Goode Administration to the dual role of adjudicator and enforcer. By utilising the discourse of terrorism, the news media exonerated the city administration from its responsibilities to all parties, and cast MOVE as the relentless aggressor in every instance.

It is unsurprising that the news media adopted this discourse to define the situation, as international items regarding the devastating activity of 'terrorists' abroad were frequent.⁵ Therefore, the Philadelphia press drew upon this reservoir of terrorism that permeated the American media both before and after the events of 13 May 1985. These events were adapted to a localised, domestic situation.⁶ One might assert that this is tenuous link to make; however, in observing the speed with which terrorist discourse enters the MOVE scenario, such a link must be explored.

For example, merely three days after the first story on MOVE had been published in *The Inquirer*, the discourse on terrorism emerged. In a Sunday editorial dated 5 May 1985 ('Time to move against MOVE'), *The Inquirer* began to assign blame in the MOVE situation.

⁵ For example, the Irish Republican Army's activities across the Atlantic featured prominently in the American press, as well as that of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Israel, the Palestinian territories, and neighbouring countries as well. In particular, Beirut, Lebanon was a hotbed of political activity involving the United States and other Middle Eastern countries in the 1980s. *The Daily News* published an article ('Terrorism Terrifies Washington; Was That Transmitted to Phila.?', 23 May 1985) alluding to this transference. "The fright in the State Department, in the White House and in the think tanks over terrorism has been communicated to local police departments as it has to businessmen who now buy armored cars and walk around with bodyguards."

⁶ At this point in the media coverage, references to other kinds of 'terrorism' were omitted. For example, the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa and its repression of a number of its constituencies was a feature in the news but was not conceptualised as terrorism.

What should the response of government be when a violence-prone, self-styled back-to-nature cult moves into a house in a traditional working-class West Philadelphia neighborhood and disrupts the peace, tranquility and quality of its neighbors' lives? [...]

All that can be done to prevent another such tragedy must be done, but a small group of malcontents and nonconformists cannot be allowed to continue to intimidate and hold an entire neighborhood, and in effect the city government, hostage.

In this editorial, much is put forth to *The Inquirer* readership in the formative stages of the media coverage. Mayor Goode is criticised for responding inadequately to the residents' requests, yet towards the close of this piece, his inaction and substandard leadership are excusable as a consequence of the history of the group: "Mayor Goode's reluctance to take action has to do with MOVE's violent history." In the concluding paragraph, the editorial suggests that responding to an inherently violent group with violence is the only alternative in preventing another Powelton Village. In stating that "[a]ll that can be done to prevent another tragedy must be done, but..." *The Inquirer* resigns itself to the inevitability of a violent solution. The insertion of the word 'hostage' at the conclusion leaves the reader with a concrete and lasting impression of MOVE as terrorists.

Wagner-Pacifici also recognises the theme of terrorism. According to her interpretation, the use of a terrorist label is attributable to a panic about the inability to characterise the group in a familiar and efficient manner. The struggle to define MOVE, or what she describes as a "hysteria of naming" actually impeded progress towards solving the conflict.⁷ Additionally, supposing that one argued for the necessity and accuracy of using the term 'terrorist' to categorise MOVE, Wagner-Pacifici notes that the term had not been defined within the Goode Administration.⁸ Consequently, this term was not accountable to any bureaucratic definition, although its usage had legal ramifications for the actions taken against MOVE.⁹

⁷ Wagner-Pacifici, *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹ Donatella della Porta views the incitement to terrorism as a "unifying aim" of the state thus blocking critical inquiries into governmental action. See "Social movements and the state," pp. 93-121 in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 70.

After the appearance of the word 'hostage' and by inference, its linguistic counterpart 'terrorist,' in the 5 May 1985 editorial, politicians and law enforcement officials appropriated the discourse of terrorism. In *The Inquirer*, 9 May 1985 ('Mayor calls situation with MOVE 'explosive'), City Councilwoman Joan Specter was interviewed about her perceptions of the conflict.

Councilwoman Specter said at an earlier news conference that the MOVE water bill had not been paid for more than two years, and the gas bill for over one year.

"It is outrageous that this city is being held hostage by MOVE, but it is even more outrageous that city residents are unwittingly subsidizing those terrorists," said Specter, a Republican.

Similar quotations appeared 9 May in *The Daily News* ('DA probe in MOVE area') and 10 May in *The Tribune* ('MOVE neighbors demand action – Mayor tentative').

Specter inflated the reach of MOVE's 'terrorist' activities. By substituting the city for a block of residents, Specter has, 'unwittingly' or otherwise, exponentially increased the threat that MOVE poses, while simultaneously casting every Philadelphian in the role of an Osage resident. Specter's extrapolation also conceptually expands the area in need of police intervention. Suddenly, MOVE members have the potential of cropping up everywhere and anywhere. In this instance, the predominantly black residential areas would be vulnerable to an increase in policing, as potential MOVE members, under a surveillance regime that depends on *visibility*, would most likely reside amongst the phenotypically black populations of Philadelphia.

This did occur, as Specter's augmentation of MOVE's terrorist threat was mirrored by Philadelphia's law enforcement agencies and their increased surveillance efforts. They not only targeted MOVE's headquarters at 6221 Osage Avenue, but also the homes of vocal MOVE sympathisers and individuals bearing the dreadlocked hairstyle. The escalation of surveillance occurred during and after the 13 May 1985 conflagration and was detailed in various news reports (See *The Daily News*, 11 May, 'Cops watch every move'; *The Daily News*, 22 May, 'For their locks, objects of dread'; *The Inquirer*, 19 May, 'Scenes around Osage from before and after'; *The Tribune*, 21 May,

'Dreadlocks: Their wearers being hassled'). Consequently, most black residential enclaves were subjected to intimidation, stop-and-search campaigns, and increased alienation as a result of this surveillance. These actions further distanced the black population from the police department in a city in which both the black and Latino populations had voiced concern over their relations with the police.

But, in rereading Specter's statement, where is the basis in making the claim that the MOVE members are terrorists? Do unpaid water and gas bills make one a terrorist? If this were so, then perhaps a great deal more of Philadelphia's citizens would have had to contend with a similar governmental assault to that of MOVE! There is no justification for employing the terminology of terrorism that the reader has access to in this particular article; presumably, the reader would have had to have read the 5 May 1985 editorial, in which the term 'hostage' was first employed, to make sense of such a bold claim.

Let us return to the principal demand that MOVE made at this point in time. The disputes between MOVE members and other residents regarding waste disposal and other activities were negotiable when both parties' interests and philosophies, however loosely formulated, were taken into account, as discussed in *Chapter 3*. The major preoccupations of the residents were the constant harangues through an outdoor loudspeaker system, and stemming from this, the physical altercations between MOVE members and other residents. MOVE stated that the harangues were designed to push the residents into making formal complaints to Mayor Goode, as he was no longer responsive to their direct requests to have the cases of imprisoned members reviewed. So, the primary burden for Goode was to examine the options available for reviewing these verdicts resulting from the 1978 siege. This was the core demand of MOVE, both inside prison walls and out.¹⁰

¹⁰ In reconsidering the justifiability of using the discourse of terrorism, the position of the Osage residents should be reviewed. As their primary demands rested with the city of Philadelphia, why did MOVE insist on making their neighbours accountable for the 'misdeeds' of Goode's administration as well as his predecessors? Why should they have suffered as a result of a conflict beyond their own purview? Therefore, were the Osage residents held *hostage* in that their position was usurped in order to gain access to a higher authority? These questions will be addressed in summation to the media analysis in *Chapter 7*.

In questioning why Mayor Goode did not follow through with this review process, it is clear from the media materials in addition to his autobiography that he was dealing with additional considerations. Pressure from other Democrats, the Republican Party in Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Police Department were directed at his administration. Therefore, addressing the MOVE conflict could not take place in isolation. For example, in contrast to the 9 May *Inquirer* article in which Specter claims that the city is being held hostage by MOVE, Goode's claims are of a different character. Setting aside the question of previous negligence, let us examine his position at the time in which action regarding the MOVE situation became imminent. *The Inquirer* quotes Goode as stating that action would be taken only when the proper legal mechanisms were in place to do so.

“The issue out there is not to go out and simply attempt to enforce a few code violations,” he said. “That’s not going to solve the problem out there. ... The issue is whether or not the people who live in that house can continue to remain there.”

In comparison to the inflammatory statements of Specter, Goode presents to the public a cautious reflection on the matter at hand. However, his career was in a vulnerable position, thus leading to a carefully balanced approach to the claims of the residents.

Also, Mayor Goode acknowledges that the enforcement of code violations will not solve the conflict in the long term (See also, ‘Our hands, tied, officials say,’ *The Daily News*, 2 May). Implicitly, the violations are not the principal issue, but an investigation into the 1978 siege. Thus, enforcing violations will neither solve the primary complaint of MOVE, nor that of its neighbours. Specter also made this admission (See *The Tribune*, 10 May, ‘MOVE neighbors demand action – Mayor tentative’). Although diplomatic, Goode avoids the heart of the problem, as he refuses to substantiate or denounce MOVE’s grievances. Here, nuance simply continues to delay a resolution.

In the days following Mayor Goode's plea for patience and adherence to the law, the media reviewed the histories of Osage Avenue and MOVE. The lives of the residents as well as conflicts with MOVE members became increasingly personalised and detailed. However, this process of individualisation was not extended to the MOVE members. Partly, this results from the group's centralisation of communication through the designated 'Minister of Information.' However, psychological profiles of members, complete with family biographies in some instances, emerged post-13 May 1985.

In reinforcing MOVE as terrorists, their victims or 'hostages' needed to be configured such that their innocence and normality in the face of MOVE's deviancy could be established. In the series of articles leading up to MOVE's confrontation with the Philadelphia Police and Fire Departments, both *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News* portrayed Osage Avenue in idealistic economic terms. Also, no written reference was made to the primary racial composition of the neighbourhood, that of black American.

News media described Osage Avenue as having attained a comfortable middle-class status upon which MOVE was encroaching and denigrating through its unacceptable lifestyle. *The Inquirer* ('Living with MOVE: Endless Trauma,' 10 May) proclaims:

[...] but this block is one of rowhouses, where people live more closely together and where the rules of good neighborliness are of utmost importance – especially since this block of teachers, nurses, janitors and police officers has worked hard to enter the middle class.

Yet MOVE has flouted all the rules [...]

Thus, accusations against MOVE also turned on their refusal to conform to middle-class ideals, regulations, and lifestyles, thus endangering the class position of others. Therefore, MOVE contaminated the neighbourhood's promotion of itself as rightful claimants to bourgeois status. The romanticism enveloping Osage Avenue continued after the conflagration. On 19 May 1985, *The Inquirer* published a front-page feature ('A

neighbourhood no more: The personal accounts of what was lost in West Philadelphia') solidifying the paper's position on this issue.

Two streets, side by side – the 6200 blocks of Osage Avenue and Pine Street – streets the residents viewed as a warm and friendly haven in a large and sprawling city. Safe. Snug.

Until MOVE came.

Then, about 2 ½ years ago, the dark times began. A group of people with braided dreadlocks and a philosophy that neighborhood residents could never comprehend moved into the house at 6221 Osage. And little by little, the neighborhood that had held together for more than six decades began to bend and ultimately break. And, finally, on a single fiery night, it died.

Here, MOVE is the element that broke the spirit of a neighbourhood and ushered in a mediaeval period of darkness and despair. However, if the neighbourhood was so unified, how is it that active measures against MOVE were not demanded earlier and with more consistency? And, if the neighbourhood survived the upheavals of previous decades, why would MOVE be the solitary factor compromising that long-term resolve? The purpose here is not to diminish the sense of 'community' that the neighbourhood possessed, but to question its romanticised depiction.

Another determinant in the construction of terrorists/hostages was the presence of children. As the assumption of victim-hood on behalf of MOVE's neighbours was necessary in reinforcing MOVE's position of terrorists, the innocence of the block needed to be established concretely. The construction of children as inherently innocent beings occupied a pivotal role in buttressing this claim. However, in this instance, the universal innocence of children was untenable, as distinctions between the neighbourhood children and MOVE children were created.¹¹

One article, which explicitly focuses on the children prior to 13 May, also highlights the manner in which some parents have used the experience as a lesson in civil conduct ('For children on block, MOVE spurs unease,' *The Inquirer*, 12 May).

While the kids played kickball, four plainclothes officers and a marked patrol car idled at the end of the block. The detectives, in shirtsleeves on a hot and muggy day, carried guns in holsters.

¹¹ The neighbourhood children were profiled in the press before 13 May. Interest in the MOVE children specifically did not develop until after the conflagration when the majority had been declared deceased.

At play, the children seemed oblivious to the unusual conditions on their narrow street of rowhouses.

But they aren't. [...]

Clifford Bond said he is frank with his two children, Aasin and Chantee, about the MOVE situation, in which residents claim they have been held hostage for three years by a group they consider violent and threatening.

In a way, he said, living on the same block with MOVE has taught his children tolerance and the proper way to deal with problems.

"I tell them there is a system," Bond said. "We have rights when things do not go according to the law, and ways to complain about it."

A scenario occurs in which the normality of children's lives has been disrupted by the presence of police on their street, a presence deemed necessary in order to ward off the danger of MOVE. MOVE, however, as a physical threat does not make an appearance until the end of the article.

Across the street [...] Ramona Africa, who identifies herself as MOVE's minister of information, sat on the stairs outside the barricaded fortress she lives in. If MOVE members now in prison are not released she said, MOVE will "destroy the entire Democratic Party, the police, the mayor and the image and economy of Philadelphia."

Two little boys stood 10 feet away and listened, mesmerized, their mouths open.¹²

Bond's civic lesson to his children represents the process of inculcating the responsibilities of citizenship into one's offspring. There is a distinction between right and wrong ways of being a citizen and claiming one's entitlements. Therefore, there is not only a concern for the children's psychological and emotional well-being, but also for the ways in which they might internalise an abnormal politics of protest.

In contrast, a debate arose over whether the MOVE children were 'hostage' to the adults, or whether they were future terrorists. This complicates the ascription of essential innocence to children, for if they are capable of violence, then the label 'child' is no longer applicable and defensible. Wagner-Pacifici comments that a lot "of the tortured

¹² If one juxtaposes the statement by Bond defending the need to follow the rules of the system, even in the absence of justice, with that made by Ramona Africa demanding the accountability of the system to the imprisoned members of MOVE, it becomes clear that the two neighbours are, in fact, agitating for the same thing: that is, the right to demand that the system act in accordance with the laws created by it. The difference between the two rests in the manner or form of protest appropriate in demanding this accountability. In this, MOVE reveals the conservatism undergirding their outwardly radical actions.

ratiocination about the MOVE children focuses on their ontological status: Were they hostages or combatants? Would they hurt the neighbourhood children, scare them, or merely play with them? This question lay at the heart of the entire MOVE conflict and confrontation.”¹³

Furthering doubt of the city’s concern for the MOVE children on Osage Avenue, and highlighting the inconsistencies in the handling of the conflict, was the case of a MOVE member and her children in Chester, Pennsylvania. The Chester Police Department, in coordination with Pennsylvania state officers, raided her home with tear gas, arrested her, and took her children into the custody of family and social services. The first news report surfaced 13 May in *The Daily News* titled ‘Woman, 5 Kids Gassed from Chester MOVE’; it was followed-up on 14 May with ‘Tear-gas in Chester’ as well as ‘Tear-gas in Chester routs six from house’ in *The Inquirer*. From the testimony of a bystander provided on 13 May in *The Daily News*, the residents had no problems with their MOVE neighbour.

Chester police conducted their own siege of a MOVE house today at almost the same time that Philadelphia police were attacking the MOVE compound [...]

Neighbors reacted negatively to the siege, claiming police routed good citizens. “They never bothered nobody,” said one elderly man who lived in back of the MOVE home. He refused to give his name.

Other neighbors described the MOVE members as “quiet, peace-loving people who kept to themselves.”

In identifying a MOVE member, the police departments involved in the matter feared that the house might harbour fleeing members from Osage Avenue. However this seems nonsensical in light of a further element. There were two other homes in Philadelphia where MOVE members or sympathisers resided, although they were not involved with the activity evidenced on Osage. Although these homes were physically closer to the primary MOVE location than the Chester residence, the occupants were neither evicted nor harassed to the same extent as the lone woman and five children in Chester. (See *The Daily News*, 13 May, ‘ ‘No bother to us’ at other 2 homes’; *The Tribune*, 14 May ‘MOVE

¹³ Wagner-Pacifi, *Discourse and Destruction*, p. 53.

people good neighbors say residents near other houses’; and *The Inquirer*, 14 May, ‘Rage voiced by backers at 2d house.’) So, if the concern was that MOVE members had refuge at other locations, why were not the homes closest to Osage subject to the same treatment as the house in Chester?

The Inquirer published a feature on 17 May to cover the reunion of the MOVE member and her children titled ‘Mother, children reunited after Chester MOVE raid.’ Within the article, welfare activists claimed that Children and Youth Services (CYS) abused their privileges to penalise a family on the basis of financial status. If the children’s welfare was an issue, then more moderate measures were available. *The Inquirer* reports:

Welfare rights activists Carolyn Saunders and Josephine Hood decried the Delaware County agency’s intervention as “political,” owing to Mary Africa’s MOVE affiliation. “We think they [Chester City officials] turned the whole thing upside-down,” said Hood. “The reality is that they created the conditions that forced her out of her home, and now they’re saying, ‘Aha – she’s an unfit mother because she has no home.’ ” [...]

“The bottom line is they [CYS] are trying to impose a lifestyle on people that have no right to impose,” Hood said yesterday, waiting in the hallway at CYS. “What right do they have to impose the ‘normal,’ quote-unquote, lifestyle on her?”

“I grew up in house with an outdoor toilet and holes in the floor that we had to plug with rags,” said Saunders. “...Now how come all of a sudden it’s against the law to be poor?”

The welfare activists critique the actions taken against this family under the aegis of derailing terrorism. The Chester home was bombarded and declared deficient according to health-code violations; consequently, the MOVE member was required to forfeit her children to CYS. Again, the concerns expressed by the city agencies of Chester did not merit the response. Furthermore, the children were declared healthy, lacking signs of abuse or neglect. So it appears that the Chester police partly manufactured this explanation to obscure reservations of having a MOVE member living within their jurisdiction. As the welfare activist stated above, it was a political act used to further dismantle MOVE. The inconsistencies in the reasoning put forth by city administrations throughout Pennsylvania highlight the lack of initiative by the media into the crucial developments surrounding the Osage Avenue conflict.

In continuing with the coverage, the Osage residents had reached such a state of unease that any MOVE activity became loaded with the potential for violence. Part of the unease stems from the residents' vulnerability, as the city avoided engagement with MOVE. Although surveillance and increased policing took place elsewhere, the residents were left to their own defences in altercations with MOVE. Therefore, the surveillance benefited enforcement and judicial authorities; as such it failed to alleviate the compromised living conditions for residents on the block. On 10 May 1985, *The Inquirer* featured a front-page article ('Living with MOVE: Endless trauma') in which residents created a stampede inside a recreation centre when it was rumoured that MOVE members had 'blockaded' the street outside. The residents, coalescing under the name of the 'United Residents of the 6200 Block of Osage Avenue,' were meeting regarding the removal of MOVE from their block. In its midst, *The Inquirer* reported that an elderly woman collapsed, as her heart condition had been aggravated by the panic.

[...] by yesterday morning, the word had spread throughout 6200 block of Osage Avenue: MOVE had struck again. It didn't really matter that MOVE had actually not been blockading the street, that a MOVE car had simply stopped in front of its rowhouse at 6221 to unload a shipment of food. It didn't matter, because after four years of living with the MOVE group on their block, many of the Osage Avenue residents are so traumatized that the slightest suggestion of trouble can, and often will, in fact, become trouble. [...]

According to Nichols, they were even promised by a local politician that MOVE would be off the block soon if only the residents said nothing about the situation during the 1983 mayoral race. "The man said the whole MOVE thing could hurt Goode, and our chances to get a black mayor," he said. [...]

Residents also learned then that their block had been singled out for unusual police treatment – it was city policy not to send uniformed police officers onto their block. Any call to 911 believed to be MOVE-related had to go first to the Police Department's civil affairs unit.

From the above, it is unsurprising that a state of panic regarding MOVE became possible. Neglected and subject to the image-consciousness through the terms of two city administrations, the residents were denied access to the formal options available to them in resolving this conflict. In subverting the terrorist discourse employed earlier, it is likely that the residents were held hostage to the realities of the political process.

Divisiveness also presented itself amongst the ranks of the city administration. In the two days leading up to 13 May, the news coverage pitted bureaucratic bodies against

one another. On the one hand, Goode maintained the necessity of caution; while on the other, the police and fire departments prepared for a violent confrontation (*The Inquirer*, 'Police, fire leaders talk over MOVE,' 12 May; *The Daily News*, 'Cops watch every move,' 11 May).¹⁴ What neither paper questioned was the discrepancy between Goode and the law enforcement apparatuses of his own administration.

III. *The "Calm Amid the Threat"*

Leading into the conflagration, the media avoided critical engagement with the elements determining the MOVE conflict. However, the spectacularisation and sensationalism of the conflict did not manifest until after 13 May 1985.¹⁵ *The Philadelphia Inquirer* introduced a running title—"THE MOVE STANDOFF"—across the top of its pages that further rendered the situation irreconcilable. In a standoff, violence is the operative medium of resolution, usually with one party 'still standing' at its conclusion. By invoking popular imagery of America's western frontiers, it was difficult for either party to back down from its position.

In the reports surfacing on 13 May 1985, particularly a *Daily News* piece titled 'Goode stays in his office,' Mayor Goode's presence was notably absent except for that relayed through selected negotiators. *The Inquirer* ('Peace talks: Negotiators try to head off violence, but say group is determined to stay put,' 13 May), *The Daily News* ('No compromise, peacemakers say,' 13 May), and *The Tribune* ('MOVE, police in daylong standoff after barrage,' 14 May) all stated that MOVE was unwilling to budge unless their

¹⁴ Again, due to the bi-weekly publication of *The Tribune*, it is absent from some parts of the analysis. In this instance, *The Tribune* missed four days of reporting leading up to 13 May; consequently, the first article to appear with regards to the city's plan of action surfaced on Tuesday 14 May 1985.

¹⁵ To prevent possible confusion, although the official attack on MOVE did not commence until the 13 May—though preparations were underway on Sunday 12 May—the media reports on the attack did not appear until the next day, 14 May.

fellow members were released from jail.¹⁶ Although complicating resolution efforts, inroads may have been made if the mayor had been present instead of relying on unauthorised individuals to negotiate his position by telephone. This element undermined Goode's position in the following days.

Appropriating Mayor Goode's leadership role were the police forces. Their presence heightened the aggressiveness of the situation, as no alternative agencies were available to provide diplomacy. Brute force was all that remained for both the public and MOVE to contemplate. Ultimately, Goode took for granted the importance of visibility in this situation. One can only consider that the police and fire departments may have acted differently in the presence of the mayor, and the members of MOVE may have been more amenable to negotiation.

The sensationalism of the conflict took place through clichéd headlines such as *The Inquirer's* 'The calm amid the threat' (13 May) and *The Daily News's* 'An eerie predawn scene' (13 May), both of which evoke popular movie culture, thus detracting from the severity of the situation. The date in question, Mother's Day, added to the atmosphere of the spectacle's formation. The papers amplified the contrast between the sentimentality of the occasion and the backdrop of warfare consuming Philadelphia.

The 6200 block of Osage, as well as a few nearby streets, had been evacuated by mid-morning, with residents instructed to take overnight belongings. Some made plans to stay with family, while others took refuge at local shelters ('Church offers a shelter to 25 evacuated residents,' *The Inquirer*, 13 May). Following the largely voluntary evacuation, police officers barricaded Osage Avenue. From the standpoint of the police department, this was done to ensure the 'safety' of ordinary residents in the area—to account for their whereabouts. However, more insidious objectives may have included the profiling of those who attempted to aid or support the MOVE members

¹⁶ Some of the headlines from other major newspapers include: *The New York Times* (14 May) 'Police Drop Bomb on Radicals' Home in Philadelphia'; *The Washington Post* (14 May) 'Huge Fire Destroys House of Philadelphia Radicals' and (15 May) 'Bizarre Mix of Philosophies Guide's the Lives of Group's Members'; *The Los Angeles Times* (15 May) 'MOVE's Philosophy: Militant Blend of Anti-materialism, Contradiction.'

Prior to the 1978 siege, the city employed a similar strategy of isolating MOVE through a blockade. Utilities were turned off, and no civilians could enter the area. However, this created sympathy for MOVE, as the city was viewed as attempting to 'starve out' members of the group, especially the children. This ill-conceived action spurred supply chains of food, water, and other necessities to the MOVE residence, bringing others into the fray.

This time however, such public outcries of condemnation were avoided. The public was eased into a sense of security and complacency. The pace of events on Osage Avenue was also markedly different from that of Powelton Village. On Osage, the majority of law enforcement activities were compressed into the space of one day, whereas in Powelton Village, the blockade remained for approximately one month and a half. Then again, this may signal differing intentions of the law enforcement: In Powelton Village, there was space to negotiate from all sides—MOVE, the residents of the village, and the city—whereas, on Osage Avenue, negotiation had swiftly fallen by the wayside.

Additionally, the boundaries were less clear-cut in Powelton Village. The residents were divided regarding MOVE and, generally, they were more suspicious of police intervention. The residents on Osage Avenue were less vocal about political issues aside from their contentious situation with MOVE, thereby whittling down other factors that may have cast suspicion on city intervention. A lack of overt activism in general facilitated the polarisation between MOVE and the neighbours, casting MOVE into an essentially hostile and inscrutable position.

As stated previously, the coverage on 13 May featured a simplistic foray into the history of MOVE's formation as well as its interaction with the city over the past decade. *The Inquirer* ran a trio of features on the topic, providing the illusion of diversity with regard to the information given to the public, but the stories were merely variations on a theme. Titles such as 'Conflict and contradictions mark MOVE's history,' 'Group's beliefs puzzle outsiders,' and 'What led to confrontation at West Phila. compound,' all

appeared on the same page. Moving from one story to another down and across the page, the same 'facts' were persistently reaffirmed.

The Daily News' coverage, although generally similar to that of *The Inquirer* on 13 May, encouraged a glimmer of respect and understanding for MOVE's philosophy with the headline 'Africa's earnest ideals broke down in practice,' but statements such as "MOVE, the radical cult that hardly anyone understands" swiftly undermined this possibility.

The Tribune followed suit on 17 May with a limited pictorial timeline of MOVE's activities during Rizzo's Administration ('MOVE burst on the Philadelphia scene in 1978') that failed to further an understanding of MOVE's philosophy, practices, and relationship to its neighbourhood and the city.

Even though both *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News* had advance warning as to what kind of action would take place on 13 May in order to make it to that day's edition, neither questioned the route of resolution advocated by the police ('Gunfire follows standoff,' *The Inquirer*, 13 May; 'Neighbor shaken as city finally moves,' *The Daily News*, 13 May). Although the articles detail the measures taken by the police, none considered the consequences of such action. On this point, the news media failed to push the city's 'resolution' to its limits, and to examine it in the context of the Powelton Village siege.

IV. Vietnam Comes Home to 'Black' Osage

The coverage of the devastation on 13 May 1985 did not reach full intensity until the newspapers released their 14 May editions. *The Inquirer* continued to utilise the feature of a running title, altered to account for the progression of events to read 'THE MOVE CONFRONTATION.' The word 'confrontation' does not match the content of the articles, as what becomes manifest is a discourse of *war*. As in the use of terrorist discourse, it was international occurrences that contextualised the events on Osage

Avenue. In particular, the Vietnam War was salient, not only in terms of tactics and spatial dynamics, but also with regard to the mentalities of both the law enforcement officers and the MOVE members.

A. *The Emerging Significance of Race*

Before discussing the specifics of the Vietnam War discourse, we should consider the parallel discourse of *race*. Up until this point, race was relatively absent in the news coverage. Earlier, it was put forth that the socio-economic status of the families residing on Osage Avenue was occluded in the media. The residents were described confusingly as both working and middle-class, but their racial composition was avoided. Omitted from reports were problems with police brutality, the encroachment of the narcotics trade and its attendant violent manifestations, and the fact that many of the residents remained on the cusp of poverty.¹⁷

Therefore, it is possible that the 6200 block of Osage Avenue had been stripped of particular characteristics for favourable and sympathetic public consumption. The papers needed to align the readers with the neighbours, and perhaps the most effective way of accomplishing this was to obscure any supposed indices of blackness. This obfuscation abruptly ended, however, when the siege on the MOVE residence began to unfold. As police forces fired into the MOVE residence and dropped an explosive onto its roof, crowds gathered, not only to watch, but also to protest this type of military action in a black neighbourhood. Thus the media were forced to confront 'race' in this context. The newspapers reported these outbursts as 'racial tensions,' thus inciting fear of the infamous

¹⁷ See Ch. 3, Table 3.3, p. 87. This representation was not simply the product of misguided journalism. Some of the neighbours were reluctant to mention the problems in their locality due to a sense of personal pride, perhaps, as well as not to detract attention from their primary concern, which was the continued encroachment of MOVE on their physical space and emotional well-being. Thus the keenness of the media to romanticise the state of Osage Avenue in order to further dramatise the situation, in addition to the self-presentation of the neighbourhood through its spokespersons, helped to obscure other crucial features of the locality.

black riot on Philadelphia's streets. *The Inquirer* ('Gunfight continues after blast,' 14 May) reported,

Armed MOVE members and raging fires were not the only problems in the West Philadelphia neighborhood last night.

Large crowds converged on the scene and jeered police and firefighters. Additional police were brought in to control the crowds at 10 p.m. Racial tensions ran high, and at 10:40 p.m. police at 61st Street and Larchwood Avenue told all whites to leave the area.

Similarly, *The Daily News* ('In the heat of the night, crowd grew ugly,' 14 May) stated,

Against a backdrop of gunfire and flames, the crowd on the perimeter of the barricaded MOVE scene last night turned bitter and racially tense. Some whites had to be escorted by police from the scene to protect them from crowds of rowdy black teens, and police and firefighters were targets of harangues and some thrown beer bottles.

The jeering crowds and "rowdy black teens" are designated as 'problems' in both articles, acting to prohibit the functions of the police and fire departments. They are not considered as protesters, demonstrating against what they perceived to be a massacre occurring in front of their eyes. Whites were escorted, as the privileged group, from the area, but neither paper examines their actions. Were they simply watching, cheering, or protesting? Were they from the neighbourhood or out-of-town spectators? The sole concentration is on black individuals, characterised as a mob-like entity. *The Daily News* goes further with reference to *In the Heat of the Night*,¹⁸ a well-known American film, which played upon 'racial tensions' in Sparta, Mississippi.

In a regular column—'The Scene'—by *Inquirer* writer Clark de Leon on 15 May, the author reiterates this theme in the article titled 'Tragedies: A day we'll never forget or understand,'

Not only did this operation result in death and destruction, but it may have driven a racial wedge between whites and blacks. I saw whites attacked by black teenagers during the blaze Monday night. I even escorted a young blond brother and sister from Havertown to their car, along with a Crisis Intervention Unit member who warned them to leave the area. As we walked back toward the fire, the CIU man tried to explain why the young blacks were jumping whites at random. "They're just mad about what happened, and they don't know who to be mad at," he said.

I guess that makes a lot of us.

¹⁸ *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) is an American film classic with Sidney Poitier cast as Virgil Tibbs, a black homicide investigator from Philadelphia compelled to work with white Police Chief Bill Gillespie, played by Rod Steiger, to solve the murder of a white man, after initially being accused of the crime himself. The film was later adapted to a successful long-running television series of the same name.

Again, the cause of these racial tensions is unquestioned. The scenario mimics the previous exposition from *The Daily News*, reducing the unfolding conflagration and deaths to a simplistic model of 'black mob threatens frightened and vulnerable whites.' However, in this column the impending danger is amplified due to the evocation of children (specifically blonde for emphasis over the degree of *whiteness* involved). Whatever sympathies the writer has for these young black people protesting against the inferno on Osage Avenue are swiftly undermined by a regrettable absence of analysis.

'Racial tension' is thus attributed to blacks calling attention to the actions of law enforcement and that of the white spectators who have surfaced in a largely black residential area; as a consequence, the article deflects needed attention from the unfolding siege, making casualties of both MOVE members and a significant portion of the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood. Racial tension is therefore a product of black people's complaints and agitation, *not* the product of aggressive and oppressive actions on behalf of individuals and/or institutions. In returning to *Chapter 3*, this explanation is concomitant with dominant views of racism in the Age of Reagan. Overtly linking 'racial tension' to protesting blacks while occluding the cause of these tensions, the news media has made legitimate protest untenable. Protest and resistance mutates into an unauthorised interference that disrupts the efficiency of law enforcement. As such, protest is criminalised and equated with the protest strategies of the MOVE members. In the deployment of such rhetorical strategies by the news media, political intervention by black individuals becomes impossible.¹⁹

In addition to the foreclosure of legitimate social and political protest by blacks in the vicinity, the role of white spectators requires analysis. As stated above, whites are positioned as those in need of protection. Here, the focus must not only include what is

¹⁹ van Dijk follows Herman and Chomsky by pointing to the problem of 'legitimate dissent,' or the limiting of dissenting opinions within the boundaries of a particular discussion. Thus the claims of the protestors are dismissed, as they do not conform to the paper's stance on the issue of racism in the MOVE situation. See *Racism and the Press: Critical Studies in Racism and Migration* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 41; and *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 2002/1988), p. xii, respectively.

obvious, or the presences, in the articles, but also its absences. Notably, the articles do not state that the members of the black crowd directly threatened the white spectators; only police and firemen are mentioned as the objects of direct abuse. This should lead one to question from what or whom did the whites require protection and shielding; furthermore, why was this cautiousness not extended to others as well? What of black spectators not involved in the taunting of the law enforcement officers—were they not also deserving of protection? What of the black homeowners forced to the physical fringes of their community in order to watch its destruction—why weren't they, as well as the MOVE members, also deserving of protection? Emerging from this delineation of black versus white, and similarly, those who are threatening and undeserving of protection versus those under threat and deserving protection, is the implicit assertion that whites are the privileged group of social citizens in this context.

By engaging in this kind of sensationalist reporting, *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News* propounded a position that altered the dynamics of the conflict. Instead of illuminating the circumstances leading to this conflict, both papers transformed the situation into one between blacks and whites. However, the racial lines were not drawn in the way in which one might expect considering the history of MOVE. In the media's explanation, it was not a case of pitting the black MOVE members against the white 'system' or individuals, as the conflict was rendered as one between black Philadelphia and its white counterpart. During this decade, urban areas were thought to be hotbeds of societal upheaval originating from within the black population. Therefore, these upheavals were perceived to place white society and its founding principles at risk. From this fear of social change emerged an increasingly unrestrained law enforcement system and 'white flight' from inner-city neighbourhoods. This is the racial context implicitly referenced by these articles. The Osage area needed to be contained as a whole, not solely that part pertaining to the MOVE residence. In this scenario, the tragedy of the loss of a neighbourhood and the loss of lives were put asunder by a callous allusion to racial incitement. However, if one were to follow the line of thinking employed by the

newspapers regarding 'racial tensions' to its conclusion, one would therefore have to consider what inspired those black individuals in the Osage neighbourhood to lash out at white bystanders and the police alike.

Emerging from later articles in *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News* is resentment by black Philadelphians regarding the fact that whites from outside of the metropolitan area arrived on the scene, not only to view the violent 'eviction' of MOVE, but also to view the site as tourists of their recently blighted urban existence. *The Inquirer* provides an initial glimpse of this phenomenon on 14 May in 'Watching, but scarcely believing, in West Phila.'

Lured by perhaps morbid fascination, or just plain curiosity, people had come to see it happen. Lining the streets long before dawn, standing in the rain at times, they had come to witness the spectacle. More than 100 people milled at the corner of 62d and Pine Streets, chattering.

Some of them drank wine. Some drank beer. Some talked about game plans, as if they were discussing baseball strategy.

The Inquirer also ran a 19 May article (under the running title 'MOVE: THE AFTERMATH') titled 'Osage Avenue the stage, devastation the attraction.'

On the first weekend showing since the bomb was dropped, attendance was excellent on Osage Avenue. [...]

A green convertible Fiat purred by [...] As it passed the intersection of Osage, Debbie Keyser stood up, blond hair blowing in the breeze, blue denim vest flapping, sunglasses on, Pentax aimed at what used to be. She leaned left 90 degrees and turned the camera for a vertical field in the viewfinder.

Click. Osage Avenue on film.

The article details people driving from surrounding cities to capture an image of the destruction as a keepsake. This activity had been so prevalent over the days following the conflagration that those residents remaining in the neighbourhood found difficulty in gaining access to their homes, or were forced to put up with encampments on their lawn.

Although this insensitive spectatorship before, during, and after the conflagration added to the hostility, the foundation of the resentment expressed by a contingent of both black and white Philadelphians was the belief that such actions would not have occurred in a predominantly white-populated neighbourhood under similar circumstances.

Therefore, many black residents of Philadelphia believed that racism not only influenced the city's policy of non-intervention, but resulting resolution.

In its rendering of racial tensions on Osage Avenue, the media simplistically reduces the conflict to one between black neighbourhood insiders and white outsiders. However, disagreement existed between black residents and other blacks arriving in the neighbourhood to protest what they viewed as yet another instance of racist police action. The press downplayed these divisions in favour of a facile bifurcation between blacks and whites. Again, blacks are represented as a monolithic population under the aegis of 'community' as discussed in *Chapter 2*.

Many blacks expressed resentment towards MOVE's neighbours for extending an invitation to a menacing and controversial police department. Read, for example, this letter addressed to the editor of *The Daily News* on 15 June titled 'In a Sense, We Dropped Bomb on Ourselves':

We were the cause as well as the solution to what happened on May 13th. And until we get it together and realize that Philadelphia's city government won't help us solve neighborhood disputes, Philadelphians must solve these problems themselves. Mayor Goode didn't drop a bomb on this city. We dropped it on ourselves. We had a hand in destroying what we had a hand in creating – a neighborhood that once stood with pride.

Because we, as a people, didn't take care of our own, I hope to God a lesson is learned from the horror, and will never repeat itself.

E. Derek Thomas
Philadelphia

In other words, the Osage Avenue residents were not blameless victims in the resulting scenario, but rather a group of black citizens invested in a violent and racist system. It is useful to revisit the debate that took place in Powelton Village over the presence of the MOVE members. Many of the neighbourhood advocacy groups that were formed in response to the MOVE issue in the late 1970s sought to peacefully resolve the conflict internally, precisely because they sought to avoid the intervention of state and city institutions.²⁰

However, it is disingenuous to equate the situation on Osage Avenue with that of Powelton Village. The scenarios are, of course, representative of completely different eras

²⁰ See Ch. 3, pp. 81-85.

in American history. Yet, this does not preclude the influence that the 1960s and 1970s wielded over what was happening in May of 1985. For instance, the 1970s heralded the close of one of the most memorable eras of civil rights history in the United States and ushered in the birth of neoconservatism and the New Right. These political tendencies were revolutionary in their own right as detailed previously in *Chapter 3*. So, this violent swing from the progressive to the regressive in terms of civil rights for blacks impacted severely upon modes of activism at the time. Therefore, blacks and other minority groups had a renewed sense of entitlement to their government and required more of it, yet this entitlement diluted the urgency and revolutionary fervour of the previous two decades.

B. Revisiting the Nightmare of Vietnam

The discourses of war permeating the media's coverage of the MOVE conflagration are articulated most poignantly in the sense of estrangement and remove present in the statements of those interviewed by reporters for both *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News*. The residents of the surrounding areas witnessing the development of the conflagration expressed confusion at the scenes of battle and war conjoined with the familiarity of daily life in the city.

Capturing the estrangement produced by a juxtaposition of countervailing scenarios is the headline of a front-page article in *The Inquirer*, 14 May, 'Battlefield: 'I'm at home seeing war,' says a neighborhood man.'

From a porch on Osage Avenue, William Anderson turned to his neighbor Gloria Carter and said, "I thought I'd seen enough of war in Korea, and I'm at home seeing war."

"This is a little war, honey," Carter said, as the two residents watched their familiar West Philadelphia neighborhood deteriorate into a smoky battle zone of charred homes and rubble. "It's Vietnam."

Here, a local resident expresses disbelief that war has arrived at his doorstep, as war is generally experienced from afar, not in one's own neighbourhood. It is also within the context of this article that the initial reference is made to the Vietnam War. One of the

interviewees, Gloria Carter, makes the first comparison of the MOVE conflict to Vietnam as evidenced in the above excerpt; however, it is the staff of *The Inquirer* that determines the nature of that comparison. The staff writers comment: "Barred from their homes, some sobbed, some protested, and some wondered dully how it came to pass that their neighborhood had to be destroyed to be saved." Thus, a neutral and unqualified comparison becomes infused by a specific set of values regarding war, destruction, and death.

One may query why it was the Vietnam War that provided the imagery instead of another foreign military engagement. For example, the Korean War is mentioned above; why not use this war as the template upon which to mould the MOVE conflict? Partly, media imagery was available to relay the atrocities of the Vietnam War to the American public, whereas this was not the case for the Korean War. But in attempting to provide possible answers to this question, one needs to venture beyond the general manifestations of war and delve into the moral justifications put forth for the Vietnam War and contrast them with those provided for Osage Avenue.

In the instance of Osage, the justification for the siege was that the neighbourhood had to be destroyed in order to be saved. One can recall that this was the rhetoric validating the United States' prolonged military incursion into Vietnam. Burning down villages in order to save them was justifiable to keep the country from slipping further into the grasp of Communist forces.

Bystanders bemoaned the use of bombs, proclaimed the need for action, but there is not one direct quote found in the articles surveyed in which a resident stated that the destruction of their neighbourhood, while regrettable, was necessary in order to rid the community of MOVE. The news media misleadingly adopted the position of the public, and the residents of MOVE's block, to put forth a moral rationalisation for the city's actions. This argument was made again in an *Inquirer* editorial that same day titled 'A tragic, flaming finale in the attack on MOVE': "In a bizarre turn of events a large part of a neighborhood was burned down in what had been conceived as an effort to save it." In

The Daily News, the approximate first reference to the Vietnam War was included in ‘They got those little children in there, God,’ 14 May.

“A policeman left the command post to chat with friends.”

“I don’t believe this s---,” he said.

“It reminds me of Vietnam. They had to destroy the city in order to save it from MOVE.”

However, this motif was not repeated in the editorial of *The Daily News*, and no similar evocations of the Vietnam War were found in *The Tribune* in the early stages of reporting.

Another angle on this moral justification suggested that it was the MOVE members who desired this confrontation and accordingly, planned and schemed to make such action come to fruition. In other words, some asserted that MOVE had a ‘death wish.’ For example in a 14 May column in *The Inquirer* titled ‘In this case everyone lost’:

The problem of course, is the children. There were maybe a dozen of them in the fortress house, MOVE children held hostage by their parents in a calculated war plan. [...]

“Back when the other thing happened,” he [neighbor] says referring to the 1978 mess with MOVE in Powelton Village,” we called the cops the Gestapo. Maybe Frank Rizzo was part of that, the way he said things. But now the Gestapo is MOVE.” [...]

The tribe had demanded confrontation, it had planned for it, it had pushed all the right buttons. And it, not the police, were in control.

Unlike the discourse on terrorism, the discourse on the Vietnam War was a subject of contention within the news media. In fact, a counterdiscourse emerged to refute the heightened proliferation of the first. As such, the positions were reversed such that it was the Philadelphia Police Department, and generally the state, that had unfairly declared war on MOVE. Various international events were brought into play to solidify this point. For example, the apartheid regime in South Africa, and other instances of the repression of blacks in the United States were cited to describe the exploitative and violent nature of the government. *The Tribune* (‘MOVE, police in daylong standoff after barrage’) interviewed a South African student on 14 May who compared his country’s actions with that of the city of Philadelphia.

Vincent Phaala, a native of South Africa and student at the University of Pennsylvania, compared the situation to what occurs in South Africa. He said one cannot equate the neighbors’ complaints with police action to remove MOVE. “Whatever they might have done, it does not justify the police action where murder is possible.”

Others stated that it was MOVE who was simply responding to the atmosphere created by the police through the increased surveillance and isolation of the group. From *The Inquirer*, 14 May, 'Rage voiced by backers at 2d house':

"They [MOVE members [original brackets]] see themselves as living in a siege type of atmosphere, and they're justified," he said of the barricades. "History proves that society is going to kill what's different. And it's wrong," he said.

Also making use of the Vietnam War comparison in the news reports were the police officers. Many, who were involved in the 1978 siege on Powelton Village, took part in the 13 May 1985 assault. The emanation of Vietnam War discourse from this source contributed to the perception of the assault as an act of protection on behalf of law enforcement officers. In a 14 May feature story titled 'For most police, the job is to wait and stay alive,' *The Inquirer* staff quote Officer Mike Stermel:

Most of the police, like Sienkiewicz, had no role in the shooting; that was left largely to the specially trained, specially armed stakeout police.

For the rest of the officers near Osage Street, the job was to keep themselves and others from getting killed.

"It's scary, very scary," said Mike Stermel, 41 a Traffic Division officer in glasses with a bulletproof vest stuffed beneath his shirt.

"You see that stuff on TV, but when it happens live, it's a different story....

"You see pictures of Vietnam, or something where that goes on. But this is the city of Philadelphia. The city of brotherly love. And stuff's going bananas.

"It's scary though. It's your life; it ain't no TV program. You're on the line."

In this quotation, the 'regular' officers on the beat are granted the status of endangered citizens just like everyone else. This victimisation of the ordinary policeman is further reinforced by the acknowledgement that many of the police officers had taken part in the Powelton Village siege and recall the death of Officer Ramp. What is not questioned is why these officers, who might harbour pre-existing resentment towards MOVE, would be allowed to participate in another siege nearly seven years later.

V. *Summary*

Resembling the terrorist discourse illustrated previously in this chapter, the Vietnam War discourse was also a mechanism by which the news media framed and interpreted the conflict occurring on Osage Avenue. The transposition of an internationalist discourse of war onto a domestic issue had the deleterious consequence of amplifying the level of threat that MOVE posed to Philadelphia.

As suggested above, the police officers perceived themselves not as an authorised force implementing law and order, but instead as a besieged and terrorised force engaged in a state of battle with a foreign aggressor who compromised the security as well as the moral foundation of this society. While one may argue that this reversal may have been necessary in order to adequately prepare the police force to confront members of MOVE, it gives rise to a number of insidious consequences.

Firstly, the domestication of the discourse of war further desensitised the law enforcement agencies involved to the nuances in the situation. This was furthered by the haste with which said agencies entered into this conflict in the first instance. By not perceiving MOVE and the Cobbs Creek Park neighbourhood as part of the American constituency, as *de jure* American citizens with rights and legitimate expectations befitting the privilege of citizenship, this enabled the police force to proceed with an amount of force incongruous with the threat presented.²¹

Secondly, a resignation to an 'all or nothing' approach becomes prevalent. If the purpose of the siege on Osage Avenue was to serve warrants, then why were other options other than a full frontal assault on the MOVE residence not considered? Why were the negotiators left out of the planning stages of this assault and given much more leverage in their dealings with the MOVE members? Why were the city council and other members of the administration not consulted about the actions to be taken? Time was not

²¹ In making this statement, I am aware of my own position in a liberal framework that invests in the notion of 'proportionate' force or response.

of the essence, as Goode had delayed for a year or more in taking decisive action; thus a week or more of additional planning would not have affected the overall picture.

Thirdly, the threat was so disfigured that any political fallout resulting from such aggressive actions on a local area were not considered. Most notably, MOVE's neighbours were not notified of the nature and scale of action to be taken against the group. Additionally, Goode was aware of the fractured state of the relationship between the Philadelphia Police Department and predominantly black neighbourhoods in the city. If he believed that the best interests of the neighbourhood would be served through this action, why not engage the various facets of the black community in a dialogue about suitable alternatives?

Fourthly, the utilisation of Vietnam War discourse was not considered in the context of the international arena. How would such actions against the American citizenry be received in others where the United States had been pressuring governments to support human rights? In other words, what does the MOVE situation reveal about the nature of human rights in the United States?²²

Fifthly, the Vietnam War discourse served to further dehumanise MOVE. Instead of the police department serving arrest warrants to MOVE, the group became a target to be eliminated from the face of Philadelphia. These are some of the issues that came to the forefront in the aftermath of the conflagration and were deliberated upon in the media.

The discourse of war magnified and distorted the actual threat that MOVE posed, just as Councilwoman Joan Specter's remarks on terrorism augmented the degree of threat. This cast MOVE as a menace to national security. As stated previously, it is semantics such as these that enabled MOVE to mutate from a local group of outdated

²² *The Inquirer* reported on 21 May ('Soviets capitalize on MOVE issue to deflect criticism') that: "Soviet propagandists have seized on the police bombing of MOVE's Philadelphia redoubt as a prime example of how U.S. authorities violate the human rights of American dissidents."; *The Daily News* (12 June, 'Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us: How MOVE Tragedy Looked Abroad') reported that the British media seized upon the MOVE episode to bolster their perception of 'typical American macho overkill.' The author did not deny this accusation, but noted that the British had not entertained a comparison between its police forces in Northern Ireland, and I would add the British police forces in general, in the 1980s.

revolutionaries to a terrorist group, thus obscuring its particularities and effect on the neighbourhood in which it resided.

Through the intersection of discourses, it emerges that a rejection or acceptance of the actions taken by the city rests on a belief in the decisive factor of race, even when that factor is refuted explicitly. The factor of race was condensed into one figure in particular, Mayor Wilson Goode. From here, the study will move into the second instalment of the media analysis, which considers the subsidiary concerns precipitating from the play between the discourses of terrorism and war.

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CHAPTER 6: PRECIPITATING DISCOURSES

The Debate over Race

I. Introduction

The previous chapter focused upon the discourses defining the conflict on Osage Avenue. This occurred through the primary discourses of terrorism, war, and to a lesser extent, the discourse of race. Precipitating from these definers arose ancillary discourses, which reinterpreted the situation in new ways. It is not that such discourses were not detectable previously, but they remained understated until after the conflagration, where they slowly emerged to compromise the image of a racially harmonious city. These derivative racial discourses constitute the second instalment of the print news media analysis.

II. The Mutability of Racial Discourses: Part I— Mayor W. Wilson Goode

Principally, the acceptance or refutation of the moral justification put forth for the siege on Osage Avenue was filtered through racial discourses. Wilson Goode, more so than any other figure involved with this conflict, exemplifies the flexibility of the character of race, its amenability to cooptation by both supporters and opponents of the siege on Osage Avenue. Thus, Goode functioned as the public figure through which race was assumed to be either a prominent factor in the siege on MOVE or an irrelevancy because of his racial identity.

Returning to the discussion in *Chapter 3*, Goode's mayoral candidacy was racially inflected, and this subject re-emerged after the conflagration.¹ Neither his orchestration of the administration nor his view on racial issues was the primary target of public discussion; rather, it was the fact of his blackness that resounded with blacks and

¹ See Ch. 3, pp. 72-81.

whites alike. The news media had yet to explicitly focus on 'race,' as demonstrated in the previous chapter, but in the face of overwhelming protestations, many Philadelphians pondered the motivations influencing the assault on MOVE. This doubt was prompted, in part, by the lack of planning, coordination, and disaster management characterising the operation.

Resulting from the discourse of war, many of Philadelphia's black residents considered themselves and their neighbourhoods as under a state of siege similar to that visited upon MOVE. Locating the MOVE conflict in both an international arena of terrorism and war, thus widening the purview of the conflict, placed black people in a position such that they began to take this issue on as their own whether or not they agreed with the philosophy or tactics of the MOVE members. This manifested itself in vehement proclamations of solidarity with or disavowal of MOVE.

A. The Complexities of Black Leadership

Linked to the status of the black population are the successes and failures of black elected leaders. As discussed in *Chapter 3*, Wilson Goode was pressured by various constituencies to ease tensions surrounding 'the race problem' in Philadelphia. For many white residents, the fear resulted from increasing instances of inner-city crime, which correlated with an inwards migration of blacks into the city. For blacks, the problem arose from the increasing disregard exhibited by the law enforcement agencies. Also, a bifurcation amongst blacks developed along class lines. Middle-class blacks were fearful of crime just as much as those in the working class, but they resented the pall that such crime cast over them as progressive citizens. Inner-city hooligans and thugs compromised the good works and upward mobility sought by middle-class blacks, thus threatening the chances of black Americans as a whole to fully integrate into and ascend within American society.

Consequently, differing class positions made it difficult to treat black Philadelphians as a unified block of voters, as the agendas of working- and middle-class blacks—although expressing similar fundamental aspirations—were often at odds in terms of implementation strategies for enforcing law and order and the appropriate distribution of municipal and federal funds. However, blacks from around the Philadelphia area overwhelmingly claimed Goode as their own, regardless of class status or political party affiliation, and therefore held him responsible for and answerable directly to them. Therefore, after the conflagration, statements such as the following from the May 15 edition of *The Inquirer* were prevalent in the news media: “ ‘We were all excited when we got a black mayor, and now look what he’s doing to us,’ Campbell [a black Philadelphia resident] said.”

Hence, the expectations held by black Philadelphians of Goode were higher because he was black. In an article published 4 July in *The Inquirer*, ‘Someone has to answer for MOVE,’ Acel Moore writes:

To many people Wilson Goode is more than just the first black mayor. He was chosen by the people in a manner unlike any other political leader in this city, black or white, before him. Goode’s campaign was responsible for 95 percent registration of the eligible black voters, and he got 95 percent of that vote. The black community contributed an estimated \$2 million to his campaign. Such a turnout of votes and money is unprecedented in a Philadelphia mayoral race.

Therefore, Goode was more than a mayoral candidate, as he embodied a shift in the political sphere. Interestingly, this faith in one individual to change the fortunes of blacks while embodying their hopes also reveals the extent to which blacks invested in the democratic process, a process which was out of reach, disinterested and discriminatory to the interests of the black population generally.

So, the conflict on Osage Avenue did not spur such an uproar among blacks purely because of the callous brutality visited upon the MOVE members; instead, what it revealed to them in spades, is that the democratic process, even when amenable to the election of a black official, will continue to isolate and demean black communities across

the country, regardless of how respectable, upstanding, and hardworking its citizens may be. Thus Acel Moore continues his article as such:

To those people Goode was the political Moses, the man who was chosen to lead them out of political slavery and into independence, influence, and power. For them to accept the fact that he is responsible for dropping a bomb that caused a fire that killed 11 people, destroyed an entire city block and left 260 people homeless is a hard and bitter reality to accept.

Before venturing into the aftermath of the conflagration and its racial implications for Goode's mayoralty, we must consider the potential obstacles that the MOVE conflict posed for a new democratic mayoral candidacy.

To an extent, the policy of non-intervention adopted by Goode's Administration descended from his predecessor, Bill Green, who had experienced a relatively calm period in MOVE's history by default. However, Goode possessed the necessary authority to request an investigation into the reopening of the MOVE cases. After the conflagration, District Attorney Ed Rendell expressed his concern over Goode's actions and contradicted the mayor by stating that the city had legal justification to enter the MOVE residence a year prior to 13 May, but were hesitant to follow through due to the volatile nature of the situation (*The Inquirer*, 'Rendell says city was told in June it had basis to act,' 18 May).

As presented in *Chapter 3*, as Philadelphia's first black mayor, Goode was under considerable pressure to marry contending forces within the city's political arena. From black constituencies, Goode was expected to bring jobs back into the area, challenge police brutality, and increase the social and economic standing of blacks within the region. However, corporate interest groups in the city sponsored Goode to a large degree. Such groups proved beneficial in terms of attracting further business ventures in the city, yet deferred funding from social and economic welfare programmes advocated (but not solely used) by primarily black and Latino constituencies. From the standpoint of predominantly white-owned corporate businesses, Goode was expected not to cater to the 'black vote,' although more than ninety percent of Philadelphia's black population, regardless of political party affiliation, voted for him in the primary mayoral election. The

political affiliation here for black Philadelphians was race-based with the objective of lifting Goode into the mayoral seat. Nonetheless, Goode was not beholden to the black Philadelphian population because they were black, but because they voted for him in an astonishing turnout of support.

One might question why Mayor Goode and his officials avoided tackling the MOVE issue forthrightly during his campaign or first year of office. Earlier, it was suggested that he needed to distance himself from 'black' issues in order to attract the support of white voters and the predominantly white-owned corporations and other business ventures. On 19 May, *The Inquirer* ('The damage to Goode and city unclear') quoted pollster Stephen Teichner as stating,

"What people respond to, quite clearly [...] is action – administrative action." [...] On the other hand, Teichner said, the MOVE situation may help Goode because it addressed two major concerns evidenced in voter samplings when Goode was elected: namely, whether he would be decisive, and whether he would accord blacks preferential treatment.

This situation, although not obviously racially tinged considering the relationship between MOVE and its neighbours, was indeed delicate in light of the group's history in the city. Returning to MOVE's primary request—a review of the 1978 court cases—presents a number of problems for a man attempting to become Philadelphia's first black mayor. Firstly, it would instigate a discussion of the politics of Rizzo and the overall brutality of his administration. Many white voters were once supporters of Rizzo; consequently Goode risked alienating them through an inquiry that could further demonise him. Secondly, a review, however rigorous, would leave Goode open to accusations of leniency or preferential treatment for black insurgents or revolutionaries, thus compromising perceptions of his political leanings. Again, Goode's campaign adopted a middle-of-the-road, conservative liberal position, thus putting him forward in such a way as to efface his 'race' in the eyes of non-black voters while maintaining a posture of an ideal black and Christian leader to attract the black vote. Thirdly, such a debate may have further polarised the city along racial lines in a mayoral race in which Goode put forth an image of unity and peaceful racial coexistence. So, an incursion into

the circumstances leading into 1978 presented detrimental obstacles to the mayoral campaign.

The MOVE situation presented a number of legal, emotive, and practical challenges that, if handled unsuccessfully, Goode could have been seen as inept at resolving a relatively small issue. Also, an effective resolution would have required the involvement and cooperation of many agencies and individuals, thus obliging the mayor to relinquish some executive power. However, Goode was known to make decisions according to his own intuition and rarely sought the input of others. *The Inquirer* (26 May, 'No longer does the mayor seem invulnerable') notes:

Before MOVE, Goode was nothing if not bold and self-reliant. [...]

MOVE was a different kind of problem, Councilman White said, but the response, in a way, was the same – bold and self-reliant.

"In this particular situation, it was almost as though the decisions were made in a vacuum, and the people who had had contact with MOVE and who had been involved in previous situations with MOVE were not consulted," he said. "I don't find fault with [Goode] in that. I'm just thinking that's the way he generally solves problems – he keeps his own counsel.

Thus, it is possible that Goode did not seek and attain an effective resolution to this conflict simply because he was not prepared to delegate power and responsibility to others.

B. Critics and Supporters of an Embattled Mayor

Continuing with Goode's propensity for 'self-reliance,' recall that in preparation for this particular siege, he did not seek the advice or direction of any member of the city council or any community organisations.² Nor did his office consult the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI), which later revealed the extensive surveillance it had maintained on

² However, it was later revealed that the council President, Joseph Coleman, spent the entire day with Mayor Goode in observing the development of the conflagration. Interestingly, no other council members disclosed foreknowledge of the events that were going to occur. Coleman's position in this matter takes on greater significance in the aftermath of the conflagration, as his final deciding vote deterred the council from initiating an independent investigation into the administration's actions.

MOVE. *The Daily News* (17 May, 'Feds: we had facts') detailed that the FBI created a specific department concerning the relations between law enforcement and various communities. Coined the Justice Department's Community Relations Service (CRS), they had had previous interaction with Goode's Administration over the past few years, but he had neglected to involve them in assessing the conflict. Goode simply conducted informal meetings between himself and three other men. His leadership abilities before, during, and after the conflagration provided ample fodder for critics in the media. However, his swift, harsh action was viewed by some as evidence of his aggressiveness or 'hardness' in combating crime.

In the days following the conflagration, the media coverage deployed terms such as 'responsibility' and 'accountability' to characterise Goode's position. Consider an article by *The Inquirer* published 14 May titled, 'Goode says he's 'fully accountable' for siege' that quotes Goode's own admission of accountability.

"And I want to say to all the people that as mayor of this city I stand fully accountable for having made that decision. I stand behind that decision, and I just hope that the casualties will be very few."

However, his leadership is undermined in an article appearing below titled, 'Officials caught in swirl of confusion: Uncertainty becomes distress as they hear reports of bombing.'

Philadelphia's elected officials were caught up in the swirl of confusion surrounding the bombing of the MOVE house last night. [...]

Like most Philadelphians, the city's elected officials relied on television and radio reports for their information on the siege on Osage Avenue.

While city councilpersons expressed their indignation or agreement with the siege, most were unaware of the details of the city's plan. The councilperson responsible for the Osage Avenue area, Lucien Blackwell, was not present on the scene to assure the safety of his constituents or to provide support. Indeed, if those involved in the planning of this siege had consulted individuals who dealt directly with the neighbourhood, then the discrepancies of the plan could have been recognised and dealt with accordingly.

The 14 May 1985 edition of *The Daily News* was more critical of Goode's press conference during the conflagration than *The Inquirer*. In commentary by columnist Pete Dexter ('Stand Up Mayor'), the writer criticises Goode's posturing in the face of the recent tragedy:

The man on television just said there were 36 houses on fire. Thirty-six houses. [...]

Thirty-six houses on fire, and this small, silly, expedient man; this politician who has been standing in the shallow end of the pool so long that people never noticed he couldn't swim, leans into the microphones at City Hall and says he takes full responsibility, as if he were somehow big enough to make what was happening in West Philadelphia alright.

In this article, Dexter challenges Goode's emphasis upon his solitary role in the siege and the fact that the rest of the country would respect him for simply taking action and accepting responsibility. Goode maintained this stance throughout the week of the conflagration as reported in *The Tribune* (17 May, 'Goode: "I stand behind the decision" on MOVE') as well as in an *Inquirer* piece (15 May, 'Goode: The right decision, despite the consequences') in which a full text of Goode's speech was provided.

Claiming individual responsibility proved to be a savvy political move for Goode, as others were put in a difficult position to either rebut his position or acquiesce to it; however, a rebuttal would be a thorny undertaking when dealing with a political figure claiming responsibility with such eagerness. Nevertheless, in the face of criticism similar to that espoused by Dexter, it is necessary to ascertain how Goode continued to maintain his position as a 'stand-up' mayor and the support he received.

One of the reservoirs of support available for Goode was through religion. Like many black leaders, he was involved in the Baptist Church, and served as a deacon in a local ministry. Often invoking prayer during press conferences and meetings imparted a degree of respectability to his position in the aftermath of the conflagration. Most notably, *The Inquirer* reported on 17 May ('Council narrowly rejects holding its own MOVE probe') that Goode called for a week of prayer for those made homeless by the fire and the deceased MOVE members. Goode also acknowledged that his faith had been a major

factor in his ability to cope with the crisis on Osage. From *The Inquirer*, 19 May, 'Goode tells how his faith helped him weather crisis':

"I'm not ashamed to say to my staff, 'Excuse me a minute,' and walk into my back room and get on my knees and say, 'Lord, I don't know quite how to solve this, but I need your help,'" said Goode [...]

Predictably, Goode received unwavering support from black Christian organisations in the Philadelphia area. *The Inquirer* ('Accounts of event conflict,' 17 May) reports that,

Goode received a strong vote of confidence for his handling of the MOVE crisis from black ministers, who offered prayers and hymns on Osage Avenue. [...]

23 ministers from an organization known as the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity set up two amplifiers and a podium, then conducted an event that was part news conference, part prayer vigil.

The group's president, Dr. O. Urcille Ifill Sr., spoke for his fellow ministers, declaring their "universal support for Mayor W. Wilson Goode and his handling of the MOVE situation. He had a difficult decision to make, and he made it. ... Our community has been severely wounded in body and spirit. We must begin the process of healing immediately." [...]

A photograph of the ministers engaged in prayer accompanies the article. The lending of "universal support" to Goode is questionable, as there is no mention of the loss of life suffered by MOVE or to the brutal nature of the siege generally. Similar renditions by the clergy were quoted in *The Tribune* ('Black clergy support Mayor's actions on MOVE,' 17 May) and in the 16 May *Daily News*, which included a front-page photograph of the clergy. However, as black religious organisations constituted a tremendous base of support and funding for Goode's election, their credibility, in terms of leading and supporting the black population, was connected with his. Therefore, to shun the mayor in the aftermath of the conflagration would call attention to their judgment of Goode as a suitable candidate.

The Inquirer article continues by contrasting the attitudes of local with national black clergy.

Dr. Joseph R. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, blasted the Philadelphia Police Department and accused it of a "mentality...still very much pervaded by the ghost of Frank Rizzo."

Lowery, in a statement issued by his office in Atlanta, said city officials must show "more sensitivity to the well-being of citizens, including children." He concluded, "This

bombastic action has created far more problems than were resolved and failed absolutely to address the critical issues posed by the dissidents.”

As a consequence of the national prominence of Dr. Lowery, he was more inclined to view the MOVE situation in light of the national tableau, thus considering the consequences of condoning such acts in Philadelphia for cities elsewhere.

Indeed, a number of national political figures came forth to congratulate Goode for his ‘decisive’ handling of the MOVE conflict. Interestingly, the conflict presented itself as an ideal event that conservatives could seize upon as justification for brutal law and order policies directed at people of colour. For example, the Chief of Police for the Los Angeles Police Department, Darryl Gates, extended his support to Goode as reported in *The Inquirer* (20 May, ‘MOVE Letter Threatened Fire: Sent two days prior to assault’). Gates said of Goode: “I think he has provided some of the finest leadership I’ve ever seen from any politician, and I hope he runs for national office. He’s jumped onto my heroes list.”³

Of significance was the support of Reagan’s Administration, particularly his Attorney General, Edwin Meese III (see *Daily News*, 17 May, ‘Meese praises Goode’s action against MOVERs’). In *The Inquirer* (‘Search at MOVE home over,’ 18 May), it was reported that: “Another top Reagan-administration official, Attorney General Edwin Meese 3^d, told a group of California police officers yesterday that Goode’s decisive action against MOVE set a “good example” for law enforcement.” Thus, Philadelphia’s actions in the handling of the MOVE conflict were highlighted and approved by a representative

³ Gates would have a media event all his own in 1992, as he was the Chief of Police in Los Angeles during the Rodney King beating. His police regime was known for its military tactics in minority neighbourhoods, particularly his 1980s initiative, ‘Operation Hammer.’

of the national government.⁴ This reflected and reinforced the policy line of the Reagan Administration as discussed in *Chapter 3*.⁵

Another important source of support for Goode arrived from a likely source, police and fire fighters' organisations. *The Inquirer* ('At scene of fire, investigators near end of the search') reports:

The Guardian Civic League, which represents black police in Philadelphia, held a news conference at which its leaders defended the actions of the city's police in the MOVE battle and rejected allegations that the attack in the predominantly black neighborhood was racially tinged.

"I would have done everything exactly the same. ...I wouldn't have done anything different," said Philadelphia police Sgt. John Green, the league's president [...]

Green's comments were echoed by Carlos Aquino, president of the Spanish-American Law Enforcement Association, who attended Green's news conference.

In Washington, the executive board of the International Association of Fire Fighters issued a statement praising city officials.⁶

As in the division between local Philadelphia black clergy and a spokesman for a nationally prominent black religious organisation, there existed discrepancies between the opinions of local Philadelphia police and national representatives. From the 24 May edition of *The Inquirer* ('Pa. declines to call Osage disaster area'):

More than 100 police officers rallied in the driving rain yesterday morning to express their support for the decisions made that day by Goode, Police Commissioner Gregore J. Sambor and Managing Director Leo A. Brooks. But the national chairman of a black police group, speaking from Washington, said he did not share their view.

⁴ Williams notes that Meese was actively involved in the effort to curtail the Fourteenth Amendment, or that which guarantees the civil rights of the individual, specifically the right to due process and equal protection under the law, and accused those who fought to defend it as "aiding the criminals." In light of this background, it is clear why he came forth to support Goode's actions. See "Police Brutality: Case Study of Philadelphia/ MOVE," (PhD diss., Dept. of Political Science, Atlanta University, July 1988), pp. 59, 100-104.

⁵ *The Inquirer* reported in an op-ed on 17 May 1985 ('Good intentions: ...but there's a moral in the MOVE confrontation') regarding Reagan's hard-line policies: "Back in 1980, Reagan was fond of scoffing at those who said our problems were complex, that there were no simple answers. "There are simple answers," Reagan said again and again. "They're just not easy ones." By that he seemed to mean that the reassertion of simple principles – hit back at terrorists, cut taxes, show force in the world – would change things for the better. But suppose you do not know exactly where the terrorists are, or how to hit them without killing dozens of innocents. [...] You cannot demonstrate the worth of a policy by the nobility of your intentions."

⁶ Although, the support of the International Association of Fire Fighters was qualified, in that, the board's statement approved of the fact that the deployment of fire fighters was withheld while potential gunfire was an issue; thus, the group was not approving of the tactics in general but of the supposed safety precautions put into play to protect fellow fire fighters.

Ronald Hampton, national chairman of the National Black Police Association, took a different view. Speaking from Washington in a telephone interview, Hampton said his organization did not endorse the police tactics.

“We disagree with the practice of dropping bombs in urban settings,” Hampton said. He added that there were “some serious question marks in our minds about where we’re going today in law enforcement.”

While local police, particularly black and Latino officers, felt pressure to defend the actions of the city in order to present a unified image of the city administration, the National Black Police Association may have had other considerations. Returning to the issue of brutality, many law enforcement units attempted to combat the image of a menacing police force. The promotion of minority representation in the police force within both rank-and-file officers, as well as within the administrative and managerial levels, was one tool used to accomplish this objective (*The Daily News*, 22 May, ‘Minority cops defend Sambor’). In the face of a nationwide campaign to regain the confidence of minority populations, the National Black Police Association needed to distance themselves publicly from the events in Philadelphia, as it may have repercussions for black police officers elsewhere. On the other hand, the Philadelphia police organisations representing both blacks and Latin-Americans needed to preserve relations with city hall, as well as to prevent a potentially divisive conflict between the officers they represent and the police department as a whole. Clearly, more than simple police procedures were at issue at both the national and local levels, thus signalling political motivations.

Yet, those speaking out with regard to the assault tactics also expressed their disdain with the conduct of the Philadelphia Police Department. On 15 May (‘Experts on police procedure criticize bombing of house’) *The Inquirer* carried a small feature article emphasising this point.

“They broke every rule in the book – if there is a book,” said Gerald Arenberg, executive director of the American Federation of Police.

“To burn down 60 homes to serve an eviction notice seems incredible,” Arenberg said from the Miami-based national association of police, which is dedicated to civil preparedness and police training.

"They destroyed the village in order to save the village," said James Fife, a New York City police lieutenant for 16 years and an associate professor at American University's School of Justice in Washington.

"In fairness to Philly, MOVE was an extraordinary kind of group," said Fife, who examined Philadelphia police procedures in the 1970s for the U.S. Department of Justice. "But I can't think of any precedent for what the police did in this situation. It's really unheard of." [...]

"It's ironic that this is National Police Week," Arenberg said, "because this could set the Philadelphia Police Department back 15 years."

Here, the discourse of the Vietnam War reappears, but it is not used to defend or support police actions. Leaving aside the issue of political partisanship, on a technical level these expert officers decried the handling and coordination of the tactics employed on Osage Avenue.

Lastly, a source of support and detraction of Goode's Administration were individual, private citizens. Here, the 'Letters to the Editor' sections of each paper take on greater prominence. In these letters, many stated their racial or ethnic identity, but these neither correlated with nor predicted their assessment of the administration.

Of those identifying as black or African-American, a noticeable cadre sided with Mayor Goode as a consequence of his perceived 'crackdown' on criminal activity in the black Philadelphian community. Echoing the statements of Attorney General Meese, these individuals believed that law enforcement bodies should exert a greater degree of force over the public for the purposes of local and national security. One fervent example was published on 17 May in *The Inquirer*, titled 'Ambivalence.'

To the Editor:

The MOVE problem demonstrates the agony that we blacks are now suffering because of our ambivalence on law and order. Some black leaders (and their white American Civil Liberties Union cohorts) have brainwashed us into believing that *law and order* is a code for racism. [...]

Now that blacks no longer have Mr. Rizzo to kick around, we are finally seeing the truth about MOVE.

MOVE did not favor freedom of speech for the residents of the 6200 block of Osage Avenue who differed from them. MOVE's [actions] were devastating the value of a nice black neighborhood. MOVE did this, not whites or the police.

When will we blacks realize that crime is the master that is now enslaving us?

Benton Clark Meadows

Philadelphia

This public response is revealing on several counts. The writer alerts us to his or her racial identity (although there is no way to verify this identity) and stakes out a neo-conservative position on the question of adequate strategies of law enforcement in the black community. Secondly, the writer assumes that blacks have neither membership nor interest in the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), as if the group's concerns were purely dominated by white American objectives.⁷ Thirdly, the writer substitutes crime for the white master or mistress in a scenario referencing slavery. That is, he or she urges us to let go of hang-ups regarding slavery and to recognise that black people are now enslaving themselves through crime. Although sweeping appropriations and generalisations of the slave experience have been put to the service questionable objectives, it is naïve to assume that the treatment of blacks during and after legalised slavery has not filtered into twentieth-century practices of law enforcement and retribution regarding black citizens.

In *The Inquirer*, 19 May, a reader explicitly mentions Goode's leadership and his failure to uphold democracy in his haste to enforce 'law and order' in an excerpt labelled 'Massacre.'

To the Editor:

I have not heard a soul express concern about the MOVE people.

What occurred was a massacre.

Yes, MOVE's behavior was provocative, and probably against the law. (I do not have enough information to make this judgment. It is difficult to distill the objective truth from what one hears from government officials and from the media.)

But, as a rule, people who break the law in this country are not burned to death, their children with them.

Our system of democracy is theoretically set up to tolerate differences in beliefs, values and lifestyles. Certainly, if someone's way of life imposes on others it must be dealt with. But by murder?

I have liked Mayor Goode, because he is likeable, because he is not a Rizzo and because in some important ways he has been a good mayor. And because he is black – I think it is vitally important to have black elected officials. I want to continue to like and support Mayor Goode, but I don't know any more.

Paula Eckardt Strock

Philadelphia.

⁷ The writer does not identify the ACLU as a matter of coincidence. The organisation had offered its legal assistance to the residents of Osage Avenue, surviving MOVE members, and families of MOVE members who suffered losses as a result of the conflagration.

This reader's comments stand in contrast to the individual quoted above. Instead of assuming that MOVE's actions were in contravention of some legal statute or another, she puts to question the barrage of contradictory information directed to the public in regard to MOVE's criminality. However, criminality is not a sufficient justification for the actions taken against the group, as she states, "But, as a rule, people who break the law in this country are not burned to death, their children with them." In other words, due process is still in order before any penalty of death can be enacted. Also, the writer alludes to the fact that her support for Mayor Goode was linked to his blackness. Although her own racial identity remains unavailable, that of Goode is presented affirmatively. However, her support is compromised because Goode's response to the MOVE crisis did not exemplify democracy being done. She wants "to continue to like and support Mayor Goode" but her faith in his ability to lead the city has been shaken.

Also on 19 May, another reader demands Mayor Goode's resignation under the assumption that the city is criminally responsible. Titled 'Resign,' the letter reads:

To the Editor:

If nothing else, the tragic events of the last several days have shown that Mayor Goode is a magnificent politician. By responding quickly to the unintended victims of Osage Avenue and the MOVE fiasco by promising to rebuild their homes, and by remaining accessible to the media, he managed to deflect and deflate public outcry against a stupid, vicious and morally, if not legally, criminal act. [...]

[...] Mayor Goode's assertion that all "revolutionaries" will be handled similarly is revolting and cynical. [...]

Mr. Goode's statement that he accepts full responsibility for the paramilitary action is empty, since it lacks remorse for the MOVE victims who have been characterized now as the enemy. His facile promise to rebuild Osage is empty, since what was lost cannot be replaced. [...]

Tony Errichetti

Philadelphia.

Here, the reader rejects the representations of the MOVE members as enemies of the state and Goode's pretensions as a 'stand up mayor.'

Others were critical of Goode, but advocated the return of Rizzo who was perceived as being more suitable for this kind of military action. From *The Daily News*' 'Letters to the Editor' on 21 May:

Bring Back Rizzo

The guaranteed solution to the MOVE situation would have been to put Frank Rizzo back in the mayor's chair for one day.

Jim Dees

Norristown

From an opinion feature on the same day titled 'To Rizzo, Kids Came First: But
'Sensitive' Goode Team Botched the Job':

What irony! The Rizzo Administration, reviled as insensitive, had proved itself the exact reverse. It had been exceedingly sensitive, extraordinarily so, at awful cost. And Goode and his people, who boast of their sensitivity to virtually everything you can put a name to, and everything they can think of, were not – repeat – not.

Here, the Goode Administration's debauchment of the MOVE crisis reaffirms the supremacy of the Rizzo Administration. Also, there is a subtle reference to the perception of race and its impact on mayoral capabilities. The author states that people automatically attributed 'sensitivity' to Goode's Administration, because of his racial identity, a quality inapplicable to Rizzo.

C. *Establishing Insiders and Outsiders*

In subsequent critiques of Mayor Goode, input originated from local Philadelphian and nationwide sources. Of those external sources, critical or supporting statements from those commenting on policing and fire fighting methods went generally uncontested within the media. But two politicians, deviating from specifically procedural issues, became the target of significant abuse for their considerations of race.

Notably, *The Inquirer* published an editorial that exemplified 'protective insiderism.' The piece, published 22 May, was titled 'Messrs. Kunstler, Conyers: No to Your Preconceptions.' The two individuals referred to, William Kunstler—a radical New York lawyer who specialised in cases pertaining to racial injustice, and John Conyers—a Congressional Representative from Detroit, Michigan, agitated for independent criminal investigations into the MOVE siege. The opinions of both men were dismissed because

they were not in Philadelphia and “didn’t know the background.” Furthermore, their attentiveness to racial implications was construed as ‘rhetoric’ and publicity-seeking.

Philadelphians need answers, not hot rhetoric. They need the healing balm of rational inquiry, not the divisive storm that kicks up whenever itinerant political hustlers and ideological pimps descend, tongues afire, stirring ashes for the cameras.

In *The Daily News*, 21 May, columnist Sandy Grady wrote ‘Let Philadelphians Handle It,’ stating:

Unburdened by any facts, Conyers did some early hip-shooting:

“In our community, among black leadership, we’re totally outraged. This is the most violent eviction notice that’s been given in history. A bombing in an urban center, followed by a torching...” [...]

Conyers also has implied that the Philadelphia holocaust was a display of racial injustice. On that he’s wrong.

A black mayor acquiescing to the bombing of black radicals and the burning down of blacks’ homes – that’s dumb, but it’s no race war. [...]

He’s a competent, articulate man. He helped found the Black Caucus in the 1960s. He’s a militant loner, scrapping with Republicans and Democrats, especially on defense weapons. But Conyers too often sees the world as a black vs. white battlefield.

This commentary reveals that those external to Philadelphia who support the actions of the Goode Administration and its law enforcement agencies are permitted to comment without reprisal, while those objecting to the city’s actions are denounced as politically-correct meddlers. Readers of *The Daily News* were responsive to Grady’s column and objected to his characterisation of Conyers. On 28 May, a reader wrote in to the editor in ‘Grady Wrong in Telling Rep. Conyers to Keep Out’:

In his May 21 column, Sandy Grady berates Conyers for calling for an investigation of the MOVE incident, and saying the incident might have been racially motivated. [...] Racism and its permeation into our societal value system affects both blacks and whites, so it’s not ridiculous to suggest that a black might be involved in a racist incident, yet not be racist himself. If Grady himself were not guilty of a racist attitude, he would applaud the efforts of all who want to investigate this police action, not just leave it to the Philadelphians in power, who mostly are white.

Ronald E. Campbell
Philadelphia

Jesse Jackson, former Democratic presidential candidate and civil rights personality, entered the fray at the beginning of June during his visit to the city. He pressed for an external investigation into the incident and visited with displaced residents of the Osage area. Thus, Jackson was perceived as infringing upon Philadelphia territory

and inciting trouble. For example *The Tribune* carried a piece on June 4 ('Jesse to visit MOVE tragedy site'); *The Daily News* carried a front-page piece on June 5 ('Jesse MOVEs on City: Asks Feds to Probe W. Phila. Fire Deaths'), and another on June 7 ('Jesse Probing or Politicking?'), which questioned Jackson's motives.

Jackson's visit, they say, was intended as a political poke at Goode by local black political leaders who have seen their own influence eclipsed by Goode's emergence as the city's most powerful and respected black. [...]

According to an aide to one politician Jackson spoke to, Jackson was curious why black leaders were directing so little outrage at the mayor.

"He said, "What is going on in Philadelphia? Why aren't you all bitching and moaning?" said the aide, who asked that his name not be used. "We told him we made Wilson. He was our savior. How do we turn on him? If we turn on him, we turn on ourselves."

The article reveals that Goode had not backed Jackson's presidential nomination because Rizzo had made an issue of their relationship. Thus, the article implies that Jackson's motives were tainted by vengeful impulses stemming from that initial rebuke. The accuracy of this accusation cannot be ascertained here. However, Jackson's previous interventions were not incongruous with his stance on MOVE. For example, he had been involved in hostage negotiations in the Middle East and routinely commented on issues pertaining to the well-being of black Americans and other minorities. However, some were grateful for Jackson's presence, as he called to question the role of the religious community in refusing to confront difficult questions regarding justice and morality. For example, *The Daily News* published a letter on 28 June stating:

What really disturbs me is the complete silence of our own religious leaders on the MOVE issue. I am not only talking about the Black Ministerial Alliance and the rabbis, but the Catholic Diocese Leadership and all those of the Christian faith who profess to the belief that "I am my brother's keeper". [...]

So I would ask of these religious: Just where do you stand when it comes to issues of morality and justice? Is the quiet of a neighborhood worth the death of 11 human beings? Yes, the neighborhood is quiet now because there is no neighborhood. Silence, as it is often said, only gives consent.

W. Cecil Travis Sr.
Willow Grove

Jackson's visit to Philadelphia brought critical issues to the forefront of public inquiry into the Osage Avenue siege. This is not to deny the possibility of Jackson's politicking; however, his statements in this instance were consistent with his previous intercessions.

The division between insiders and outsiders extended to the media itself.

Philadelphia journalists defended their home turf against syndicated writers from elsewhere, even if that columnist was a regular contributor to a Philadelphia newspaper. Dorothy Gilliam's article in *The Daily News* on 21 May, 'Black Philadelphians Must Ask The Mayor Some Hard Questions,' initiated this conflict in the news media.

The job of the police is to protect the public by containing the use of violence, not expanding it. The decision to bomb Osage Avenue was an overreaction of extreme proportions.

Ironically, the sad and frightening thing is that the men who used this juggernaut of force, this overkill, if you will, are black. Leo A. Brooks, the former Army general who is the city's managing director, said of his decision to drop a bomb, "We believe we did what we thought was appropriate for the occasion." [...]

There is an intimation here of black people devaluing black life, and some blacks have pondered whether Goode and Brooks would have acted in the same way if that house had been occupied by a group of equally loony and offensive white radicals in a neighborhood of Chesnut Hill.

One can only hope that the citizens of Philadelphia will ask hard questions of the mayor, and that blacks particularly will lead the inquisition. I also hope that other mayors, white and black, will learn from this tragedy that it is suicidal to wantonly use unnecessary force.

In the 22 May edition of *The Daily News*, columnist Jill Porter responds to Gilliam's article with one of her own, 'MOVE from a warped perspective.' In it, she denounces Gilliam for casting race as an element in the conflict on Osage Avenue and explicitly identifies her as a journalist working for *The Washington Post*. Furthermore, she asserts:

Many accusations about city and police officials have been made in the aftermath of the bombing of the MOVE compound last week, most of them valid. [...] But, at least, most Philadelphians were grateful that it wasn't a racial issues.

If a white mayor had bombed MOVE—if Frank Rizzo, God forbid, had bombed MOVE—the fire would have spread far beyond West Philadelphia. That fact is acknowledged by whites and blacks alike. [...]

But the charge of racism is apparently too seductive for some self-promoters to avoid. So despite the circumstances that would seem to make the accusation totally inapplicable, some people are trying to reduce the disaster in West Philadelphia to a cheap racial cliché. [...]

And yesterday, we have more allegations by syndicated columnist Dorothy Gilliam of the Washington Post. Gilliam couldn't find a white scapegoat to pin racism on [...]

In Porter's response to Gilliam, Porter resents the possibility of racism as an element in the city's handling of the conflict presented by Gilliam. Strangely, she states that the situation would have been different if Rizzo was in charge, which is most likely true, but

Porter's assumption that the presence of Goode automatically negates the element of racism is inconsistent with this position.

D. Racial Caricatures: The Debasement of Mayor Goode through Race

While *The Inquirer* carried numerous features rejecting the element of race altogether, some columnists in *The Daily News* ventured to extremes in their attempt to relate Goode's disservice to the black population by portraying him as an Uncle Tom-like character. Before probing the specifics of this caricature, it would be of use to provide an example of how the media deployed the stereotype. The first of such articles in *The Daily News* was a piece by black columnist and Senior Editor, Chuck Stone, on 14 May, 'The Bomb that Shattered a Civility.' He writes:

"I take full responsibility for the actions of my commissioners," arrogantly boasted Goode, while shuffling and head-scratching with a dexterity that would have awed Stepin Fetchit.

The Mayor suffers from the delusion that if he says something firmly and repetitively, it becomes an *a posteriori* truth.

Chuck Stone's argument is well-founded, but instead of reinforcing his pointed critique of Goode with facts or more insightful analysis, he resorts to vicious race-baiting. Stone goes further in calling Goode 'Wily Willie' and portrays him as a man who 'tap-dances' to please white leaders in the city. In place of saying that Goode compromised the interests of a significant number of residents through proper and diligent critique, Stone chose the avenue of degradation and *denigration*.⁸ If Stone's principal objective was to highlight the oppressive treatment of Philadelphia's black population, then this class of analysis only furthers this treatment.

The invocation of Uncle Tom-ism signals the attempt to describe a particular relation between blacks and whites, one possessing numerous historical referents. However, such a characterisation has never been adequate in conceptualising the complex

⁸ This word is used intentionally, as the Latin origins of the word describe the action of sully or demeaning through blackness, or the process of blackening.

relationships between blacks and whites on the question of power. To do so here would be at worst, an untruth, and at best, a cheap shot at the leadership at Goode. So, when race has thus far entered the discussion of the conflict on Osage, it has received scant critical attention from both ends: It is either summarily and contradictorily dismissed or invoked in such a stereotypically crass manner that it feeds the deployment of derogatory caricatures.

However the level of Stone's critique is elevated in a second piece published 24 May, 'Wilson Goode's Ethical Credibility,' also in *The Daily News*. He retorts,

Yet given Goode's charmed propensity for duplicity, don't be surprised if the Brown Commission whitewashes Philadelphia's black mayor. [...]

This time, black Philadelphians are loath to condemn their first black mayor. Ethnic loyalty has a strong emotional tug.

White Philadelphians – *especially the media* – don't want to concede that a black man they could finally be comfortable with, after the strident rhetoric of Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan, has made an irretrievable mistake. After all, Goode was supposed to prove affirmative action works.

So, for their respective myopic, selfish and antediluvian reasons, both groups are standing loyally by Goode.

While maintaining the derogatory remarks evidenced in the 14 May piece, in this subsequent article, Stone manages to explain the issue of loyalty among black communities to black leaders who not only refuse to address the interests of their constituencies, but destroy them by mimicking an accepted model of governing, a model developed by and for the use of a predominantly white leadership strata.

Readers of *The Daily News* responded to Stone's stereotyping and criticism of Goode. For example, on May 24:

Stone Is Criticized for His Criticism of Goode

I take issue with Chuck Stone's obvious racial slurs against Wilson Goode in his May 14 column. The MOVE issue may have triggered an emotional war, but Chuck Stone has inflamed the war.

I saw no bandana on Wilson Goode. I saw no shuffle or tap dance. I saw a political leader caught in a very moving problem. But that leader made no excuses, and took the blame for a situation that no one wanted.

Let us see Stone show as much guts as Goode and act like a responsible black who has reached a great position in the journalistic world. It will take much longer to undo the

harm Stone has done than it will to rebuild the neighborhood destroyed in the MOVE incident.

Stone should use his position to build the black community, not destroy it.

Shirley Porter
Malvern

and,

Chuck Stone: You, Sir, have added a new dimension to the meaning of yellow journalism. You are determined to turn the recent events surrounding MOVE into a racial issue. Your slanderous remarks about Mayor Goode simply reinforce that impression.

Admittedly, the mayor may have erred in judgement; that does not make him a Step 'n Fetch It. I resent your taking shots from the sideline when you clearly are not aware of all the events leading up to his decision.

Richard Chetson
Bryn Athyn

In the first letter, the writer berates Stone for not acting like a “responsible black” and reserving his critique of Goode. While Stone’s rhetoric is deplorable at times, one must put to question this notion of ‘responsible blackness’ as well as consider why the writer does not hold Goode to the same standards. If the criterion of such racial membership rests on preserving the black community, does not Goode stand guilty of this offence?

While Stone’s depiction was inappropriate and damaging to attempts to understand the racial implications of the Osage Avenue crisis, one letter written to the editor reversed the stereotype yet again in order to characterise black critics of Mayor Goode. In other words, if one criticised Goode, then one was an Uncle Tom. On 26 July in *The Tribune*, the writer emphasises Goode’s southern upbringing in contrast to ‘uppity Northern Uncle Toms.’

To The Editor:

The Mayor comes from southern stock; honest, decent, up-bringing. Too honest, perhaps? Martin Luther King was of identical stock. Wholesome, clean. The success of his Alabama boycott proved that southern Blacks know the value of unity. [...]

Unfortunately the northern Uncle Toms know little about honesty, dignity, and self-pride. [...]

The Mayor’s problem here is jealousy, in many opinions. His being a southerner is the first strike against him. W. Wilson Goode is a handsome, decent, educated and intelligent man whose ambition made him Mayor of the fourth largest city in America. Thus northern Uncle Toms resent, lack these qualities, and like crabs in a barrel, this “select few” have set out to destroy the Mayor. They can better cope with their own.

A. R. Maynor
Woods
Author & Poetess

In this dense excerpt, the writer constructs an extremely romanticised version of black American history that serves to further essentialise particular characteristics of black people. In contrasting ‘honest’ southern blacks and their lesser northern counterparts, she enters into yet another series of racial stereotypes. She pits a romantically hewn image of rural people, of *folk*, against the tainted and corrupted class of blacks in the northern states. Recall E. Franklin Frazier’s argument in *Chapter 2* that the mass northern migration of blacks is often blamed for the disintegration of the black family, thus leading to the disintegration of morals and values that supposedly inhered in the south.⁹

So, in Chuck Stone’s columns and in the selected ‘Letter’s to the Editor,’ we can see that ‘race’ is clearly at issue. Specifically, there exists contention over meanings of blackness and its attendant imagery.

III. The Mutability of Racial Discourses: Part II—MOVE

The discourse of race enveloping Mayor Goode has been the topic thus far in this chapter. At this point however, it is important to return to MOVE and the representations of its members in the press in the aftermath of the Osage Avenue conflagration. This section will reintegrate MOVE into the scenario by considering the impact of racial identity upon the group.

While the importance of Goode’s racial identity was debated vigorously, MOVE’s was implied but not subjected to the same degree of controversy. However, this does not preclude that particular racial discourses were put into play in order to characterise them malevolently. *Chapter 5* established the discourses of war and terrorism, and while these were prominent after the conflagration, they began to intersect with and were transformed by others. In contrast to Goode’s blackness and its implications for accountability and responsibility, that of the MOVE members carried an entirely different import.

⁹ See Ch. 2, pp. 36-39, spec. p. 39 n37.

The discourse that came into play was that of primitivism. This is a marked shift from the earlier attempts to construe MOVE members as the Viet Cong and terrorists. While MOVE was threatening prior to the siege, they swiftly devolved to ineffectual and antiquated revolutionaries, inadequate parents, and primitive children. This discursive reversal took place through portrayals of the group as child-like human beings who were out of touch with Western civilisation and lacked the appropriate knowledge of the technological world.

A. *Individualising the MOVE Members*

As stated in *Chapter 5*, the biographical backgrounds of individual MOVE members were absent initially from the news media, as they were portrayed as a collective with one voice; again, this was partly due to their self-representation. However, after the conflagration, the media rectified the gap in the public's 'knowledge' of the situation by publishing a series of MOVE retrospectives.

Coming to terms with MOVE required a return to 1978. Thus the media, principally *The Inquirer*, published articles outlining those members involved with the 1978 Powelton Village siege. On 14 May 1985 *The Inquirer* published two pieces ('15 MOVE members remain in state prisons') and ('Principal figures in the Powelton Village assault: Where they are now'). These articles profiled some of the police officers and named the nine MOVE members, five men and four women, who were imprisoned in various Philadelphia correctional facilities for sentences of thirty to one hundred years each. The first article reveals the extensive surveillance of MOVE members maintained inside prison, and informs readers that the members have consistently agitated for their ability to exercise freedom of religion through hunger strikes, small-scale riots and other disturbances. This information has the potential to both reassure the public that these 'criminals' have been removed from free society for a long period of time, but it also reinforces the need to keep the members in prison as they persist in maintaining an

‘abnormal’ lifestyle. Another *Inquirer* article (16 May, ‘Jailers keep close watch on MOVE’) goes on to assure readers that the surveillance techniques have been expanded to account for the recent events on Osage Avenue by placing individual members in isolated cell units and reports that “all press requests for interviews with imprisoned MOVE members were being refused in order not to incite passions among them or the general prison populations.”

The media also introduced the reading public to former members of MOVE. For example, *The Inquirer* (22 May, ‘An insider’s view of life within MOVE’) printed a piece on Valerie Janet Brown who left the group in 1981. *The Inquirer* on 16 May 1985 also published an interview with former MOVE member and co-founder Donald Glassey (‘Talk of a lost dream, a distorted idea: ‘Why do you dredge this up?’ asks MOVE co-founder’). Aside from confirming the origins of the group and the manner in which he defected from it, Glassey displayed no remorse over the recent deaths of his former cohorts, describing them as “raving lunatics” and admitting to fearing for his own life. However, it is crucial to recall that Glassey became a federal informant for the government in the 1980s during legal action connected to the Powelton Village siege. The *Daily News* confirmed Glassey’s disposition towards his former group members on 16 May 1985 (‘Ex-disciple hits cult’s ‘control’’).

Some columns relayed information from the families of recently deceased MOVE members. One piece from *The Inquirer* (21 May, ‘From disparate lives, they found unity in MOVE’) initially portrays the MOVE members as ‘broken’ people looking for solace in the controlled and delusional environment provided by John Africa. They were described as having weight problems, drug addictions, depression, or issues concerning their racial identity, but one family member in particular attempted to combat this image. A cousin of Conrad Hampton Africa stated, “We heard rumors [...] People believe Conrad came from a low-class background, had mental problems. When I heard that, I was hurt. I wanted that cleared up.” In other words, the MOVE members were portrayed as socially underdeveloped in one sense or another, but this individual wanted to provide

another insight into the lives of MOVE members by publicly asserting a stable and supportive family background for her cousin. The point here is not to claim that no such psychological or social issues affected individual MOVE members, but it is necessary to consider other aspects of their lives, as assumptions of mental illness and the like facilitate the process of dehumanising MOVE.¹⁰

B. Dehumanising MOVE

Through such profiles, the media humanised MOVE by giving them individual personalities, families and friends, which made the group manageable. This counteracts the previous discourses of terrorism and war, through which MOVE was made into 'the enemy.' This process is described succinctly in the following column from *The Daily News*, 17 June, 'Creating 'Non-People' Makes Hating Easier.'

It's necessary to dehumanize people before they are abused. First they must be turned into the enemy.

MOVE members became enemies.

The word was spread that they wore dreadlocks, which sounds pretty bad, even though they are only a hairstyle.

Public opinion was that MOVE members didn't bathe, had horrible body odors, bred rats and roaches, ate raw dog meat, used their children as shields against police bullets, and carried on at all times in an indecent, uncivilized manner.

In this column, they were called anarchists – and they are.

But they never stopped being people.

The previous characterisations of the group were obsolete, so it was necessary to make MOVE more accessible and therefore subject to defeat. When the media entered into its phase of technical investigation into the conflict, the MOVE members were subtly dehumanised through the callousness of describing severed and burned body parts, crushed bones, and mutilated features. These illustrations, if contextualised in a different

¹⁰ George Gerber notes: "Typically isolated from their social and historical context, denied legitimacy of conditions or cause, and portrayed as unpredictable and irrational, if not insane, those labelled terrorist symbolize a menace that rational and humane means cannot reach or control." See his "Violence and Terror in and by the Media," pp. 94-107 in Raboy and Dagenais, *Media, Crisis and Democracy* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 96.

manner could have accomplished the opposite: to humanise MOVE in the eyes of the public. But the distanced and mechanical descriptions served to undermine the recognition that human beings had died an excruciating death.

The Daily News printed the first of such articles on 16 May ('At morgue, a grisly jigsaw puzzle') and *The Inquirer* followed suit on 20 May ('Identifying bodies is a huge and grisly task'). Excerpts from the latter describe the activities of forensic experts, including anthropologists, dentists, pathologists, and FBI scientists on Osage Avenue:

The bodies and partial remains were put into separate body bags marked A, B and C [...]

[These] were soon joined by other stretchers, and by Wednesday, afternoon stretchers D, E, F and G had been rolled into the big room with all the stainless steel. Presumably the seven stretchers represented at least seven people, but the technicians couldn't assume this, because in all that carnage there were only two nearly complete bodies; everything else was bits and pieces, large and small, male and female, adult and child. [...]

Hurt [an FBI fingerprinting expert] took a blackened digit, washed it under a water faucet and inspected it. He could just barely see ridges. With a scalpel, he cut away the epidermis, the thick top layer of skin on the pad of the thumb. This contained the ridges constituting a fingerprint. He washed this fragment under the water and then, fitting the fragment over his own gloved finger, he made a fingerprint.

The above renders the MOVE members as a *mélange* of body pieces commingled with decomposing animals and debris, not former human beings. While a certain amount of description may have been necessary, the extensive detail—referring particularly to the activities of the fingerprinting expert—was insensitive to the family and friends of MOVE members. Later in the article, the writer references the 1978 Jonestown incident in which over nine hundred individuals were involved in a 'mass suicide' under the influence of Jim Jones in Guyana. The Jonestown event, although inserted loosely (it was used to demonstrate the prior activities of FBI fingerprinting experts), links the activities of MOVE to a suicide mission. Inferences of suicide negate the possibility of wrongdoing or neglect on the part of the city administration.

The dehumanisation of MOVE members affected those who resembled them physically and stylistically. As discussed in *Chapter 5*, police blatantly profiled those who wore dreadlocks.¹¹ This chapter recounted the attempt of welfare agencies in Chester,

¹¹ See Ch. 5, pp. 120-121.

Pennsylvania to sequester a MOVE member from her children as well as the partial destruction of their home. Additionally, the police conducted surveillance on the residences of other MOVE members and sympathisers. Combined, these actions constituted a systematic attempt to eradicate the vestiges of MOVE, and to instil fear and distrust in those Philadelphia neighbourhoods in which MOVE might reappear or try to re-establish its base.

However, two obstacles prevailed in the attempt to consign the deceased MOVE members into oblivion. Yes, the majority of the remaining group members were imprisoned with extensive sentences and others even resembling the group became the targets of police profiling, eviction, and harassment by social welfare agencies. But there remained the matter of the two survivors of the Osage Avenue siege: Ramona and Birdie Africa. Ramona was subsequently imprisoned and would remain a non-issue for some time in the media, but what was to become of the child, Birdie. A child of this age was not so easily disposed of through the criminal justice system, so other means were necessary in order to put public inquiry to rest. The final act in this stage of the city's history with MOVE in Philadelphia was the reintegration of Birdie Africa into normal, civilised society.

After emerging burned and traumatised from the conflagration, Birdie Africa was subjected to a process of physical and psychological rehabilitation. Guardianship of the child was the subject of intense debate, as Birdie's biological mother, Rhonda (Harris) Africa had died in the fire. The dilemma was solved when Birdie's biological father, Andino Ward, Jr., came forward to claim paternity. Separated from Birdie's mother, Ward claimed to have sought custody, but was deterred by threats originating from within MOVE.

The news media presented Birdie as primitive, devoid of knowledge regarding technological instruments, a proper diet, and lacking reading and writing skills.¹² On 29

¹² In returning to MOVE's own philosophical platform, the group was partly 'in tune' with certain notions of the 'primitive' in order to put forth its version of authentic blackness; thus, these

May ('Reunion: Birdie Africa leaves hospital with a father he hardly knows') *The*

Inquirer reported:

Birdie, 13, a child of MOVE who was raised on a diet of raw eggs and vegetables and who cannot read or write, went home with his father, Andino R. Ward, to a toy-strewn suburban house crammed with modern conveniences, including a videocassette recorder and a collection of *Three Stooges* tapes.

Sporting a short haircut in place of the dreadlocks he wore when he entered the hospital, Birdie took home a pair of binoculars and a Walkman – gifts from his father. He had a new catcher's mitt and his very first baseball, presents from his grandfather, who sells suits for a men's clothing store.

And he left the hospital, his father said, with a newly acquired taste for hamburgers, fried chicken and raspberry Popsicles.

While it is deplorable that Birdie and the other MOVE children were denied an education, this is not what the article emphasises foremost in Birdie's 'rehabilitation.' *The Inquirer* isolates the material objects and 'normal' childhood experiences that were absent from Birdie's life in the MOVE household. Although there is no assessment of Ward's capability of raising Birdie in the context of a new family, the article leads the reader to consider that moving into suburbia and watching *The Three Stooges* is an adequate environment for raising a child facing a myriad of challenges. The media focuses upon the superficial elements necessary for leading a 'normal' American life—television, toys, a good hairstyle, and hamburgers.

In the attempts to impose a new identity on this beleaguered child, the old was summarily dismissed and erased. The first change was his name. In a 30 May follow-up piece ('Mother may have died for son in fire'), *The Inquirer* notes that Ward changed Birdie's name to his own, Andino. This was expressed more clearly in *The Daily News*' 29 May ('Bye, Bye Birdie: Father giving MOVE teen a new name, a new home and a fresh start'). If we consider that the act of naming someone is in fact an act conferring an identity on that person, then it is plausible that this was the ultimate act in making Birdie/Andino anew. Also Birdie's dreadlocks were cut off, and his father expected him to eat cooked food immediately, both of which were contrary to the teachings of MOVE.

qualities were seen as empowering and liberating from the standpoint of the group. Nonetheless, civil servants and the media recuperated this discourse of primitivism in order to justify Birdie's rehabilitation.

Ward declared his intent to introduce Birdie to “what he hopes will be the beginning of a life filled with opportunity” and that he was “committed to providing Birdie every opportunity to become a productive citizen.” What fulfilling these assertions would entail is left to the reader to ascertain.

In addressing the media’s portrayal of Birdie Africa/Andino Ward, what arises is a specific conceptualisation of the proper black American family and a sense of closure to the MOVE situation. Returning to the Sociology of the Negro discussion in *Chapter 2*, the preoccupation with the pathology of the Negro/black community centres upon the nuclear family structure¹³; therefore, a subsidiary, racialised discourse on MOVE re-emerged through the figure of Birdie Africa. The MOVE members were thus portrayed as a deviant example of blackness that could be rectified through the proper nuclear structure, complete with an interested, dominant father figure (Andino Ward) and civic mentality.

After the immediate ‘terrorist’ threat had dissipated, the concern shifted to the most efficient way in which to ‘civilise’ Birdie Africa. Anthropological language, references to ‘third-world’ children, and international instances of poverty became prevalent.¹⁴ The task became one of inculcating him with a specific educational, familial, cultural, and citizenship model in order to bring this ‘stray’ individual back into the fold.¹⁵ Returning to the statements of the welfare activists in the MOVE incident in Chester, Pennsylvania, the agencies lavished extensive attention on Birdie after the conflagration, but where was the concern before the conflict? What of all the other children living in deplorable circumstances? Through this belated action, the state agencies were able to redeem themselves.

¹³ See Ch. 2, pp. 36-42.

¹⁴ See an article published three years removed from the 1985 incident by Michael Capuzzo, titled “The Miracle of Birdie Africa,” in *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, 8 May 1988: 12-30.

¹⁵ Returning to Uday Mehta’s argument in *Chapter 3* regarding liberal exclusivity, we can observe in this situation the linkage between acquiring citizenship rights and human dignity, and sanctioned forms of identity. See pp. 54-57.

IV. Summary

In this chapter, the significance and prominence of 'race' and racial politics has been demonstrated in different and contradictory ways. The discourse of race infuses subsidiary discourses such that criminality, law and order, insiders and outsiders, relates to the policing of certain kinds of blackness. This was considered in light of the racialised representations of both Wilson Goode and the members of MOVE. In juxtaposing the above with the analyses presented in *Chapter 5*, the 'enemy' discourses of terrorism and the Vietnam War, and the discourse of primitivism/infantilisation defining MOVE, are two sides of the same coin, conferring irrationality on the designated subjects while facilitating the need for brutal intervention and control.

The focus on MOVE was overwhelmed with a vigorous debate about Goode's viability as a leader in the aftermath of the conflagration. Therefore, there were larger political imperatives at stake in the MOVE situation than initially put forth by the media, primarily relating to the symbolic importance of race. However, the analysis of the news media in this chapter also has demonstrated that invoking 'race' or racial implications is often viewed as 'playing politics.' Those who demanded recognition of the issue of racism in relation to the neglect of the residents of Osage Avenue, as well as the handling of the siege on MOVE and its aftermath, are presented as over-intellectualising the scenario and imposing a personal agenda on Philadelphia politics. Paradoxically, a rejection of race signals its importance. Therefore, the treatment of race through the news media in this chapter most clearly demonstrates the applicability of the thesis outlined in *Chapter 1*: the importance of MOVE in symbolically illuminating the formation of black American politics.

CHAPTER 7: THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF THE MEDIA

I. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the news excerpts provided illustrated the discourses brought to bear on the MOVE situation. What takes place is not a redefinition of the history of MOVE, but rather, a measured infusion of the relevant social issues impacting upon the group and its relation to the city of Philadelphia. This chapter consists of two primary sections. The first will review a formal element of the news media, namely the editorial, and its impact upon the overall position of each newspaper. The second part constitutes an attempt to come to terms with a certain consciousness of and about the media in the MOVE situation; this section is intended to make obvious the presence of the media by illuminating the Philadelphia administration's comments about the role of the media and vice versa. Additionally, we will examine the use of the media by MOVE.

II. Assessment of Individual Papers

In returning to the preliminary assessments of the individual newspapers in *Chapter 4*, it was stated that of the three newspapers, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* strove to adopt a formal, centre-liberal position; *The Philadelphia Daily News* presented itself as a popular, gritty daily newspaper; and *The Philadelphia Tribune* positioned itself as the long-suffering 'voice of the black community.' These evaluations inferred a degree of balance in the coverage of the situation on Osage Avenue. Yet, these assessments have been re-evaluated along with the importance of balance in the news media. 'Balance' becomes an explicitly manufactured element providing the appearance of an equal representation of differing and opposing viewpoints on specific issues. Emerging with more importance in the analysis of the news media is the availability of differing voices, or permissibility of

various constituencies to be presented, whether or not they fall along the lines of, or conform to, the dominant issues at hand. The two may seem similar, the notion of balance and the permissibility of voices outside the mainstream, but they represent distinctly different qualities. This is not to say that one paper is more accurate than another, but some are more willing to air certain concerns and become entangled in the complex web of issues comprising this local tragedy.

The formal element on which this section will focus is the editorial. While there are many other elements of the paper news medium that could be addressed, such as headlines and 'letters to the editor' (some of which were explicitly discussed in *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6*), the editorial represents the position of each paper, the mobilisation of its voice to persuade or to represent the interests of 'society' or 'the public.' In strictly considering the editorials of the three papers analysed, the following reports the findings and broadly considers the paper as a whole.

A. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

Through its editorial section, *The Inquirer* approached the MOVE situation principally through the standpoint of 'legitimate' authorities. Specifically, the paper gave credence to Goode's office, the Philadelphia Police and Fire Departments, and the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission, as well as additional social welfare agencies.¹ The needs and actions of these parties were privileged exclusively over and above MOVE, other community leaders or spokespersons, and the residents of Osage Avenue. Thus, *The Inquirer* was wedded to the power of authority and the reproduction thereof. The paper

¹ Kellner remarks: "The broadcast media also characteristically rely on a narrow range of established and safe commentators and are not likely to reach out to new and controversial voices in a period of national crisis. The media generally wait until a major political figure or established "expert" speaks against a specific policy and that view gains certain credibility as marked by opinion polls or publication in "respected" newspapers or journals." *Media Culture: Cultural studies, identity, and politics between the modern and the postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 213. See also Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 133; and Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press: Critical Studies in Racism and Migration* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 40.

only reported in the realm of what was sanctioned and thus, appropriately newsworthy. Each editorial considered was preoccupied primarily with the attribution of blame, a quick recovery from the conflagration, and the overall image of the city of Philadelphia. Thus, *The Inquirer* exhibited limited scope with regard to other issues, particularly the relevance of racial implications.

Beginning with the editorial published 5 May 1985 ('Time to move against MOVE'), *The Inquirer* is resolute in its anticipation of a 'tragedy' to occur on Osage Avenue.

Mayor Goode's reluctance to take action has to do with MOVE's violent history. [...] All that can be done to prevent another such tragedy must be done, but a small group of malcontents and nonconformists cannot be allowed to continue to intimidate and hold an entire neighborhood, and in effect the city government hostage.

In this pivotal editorial leading into the siege, the paper establishes a position on three important points. Firstly, the paper excuses the mayor's office from responsibility in responding to the concerns of MOVE's neighbours. Secondly, in conceding that violence is necessary in order to uproot MOVE from its location, potentially non-violent solutions to the conflict were eliminated from consideration. In other words, it is worth risking a potential tragedy if the result is MOVE's elimination. Thirdly, the paper uncritically adopts Councilwoman Joan Specter's characterisation of MOVE as terrorists holding the city hostage. Therefore, at the very beginning of the city's active involvement in the conflict, *The Inquirer* has left no room for manoeuvre. An obdurate and detrimental blame has been attributed swiftly to MOVE by adopting a perspective stemming from the city administration; this blame excuses the administration from accusations of negligence and wrongdoing in the handling of the neighbourhood's concerns.

The following editorial on 14 May ('A tragic, flaming finale in the attack on MOVE') retreats from the assuredness evidenced above. The paper characterises the resultant 'tragedy' as 'bizarre' and somewhat surprising.

The flames that lit the West Philadelphia sky last night were grim testimony that the city's move against MOVE went terribly wrong. What had begun as an apparently well planned and tightly disciplined siege at dawn had deteriorated to a raging inferno by dusk. In a bizarre turn of events a large part of a neighborhood was burned down in what had been conceived as an effort to save it. [...]

A principal reason for patience and caution [...] was the memory of the 1978 shootout [...]

It ultimately was the neighborhood itself that demanded confrontation. [...] The destruction from the fire exceeds many times the damage that had been done to the neighborhood by MOVE. That is the supreme irony and enduring tragedy.

A 'tragedy' that was acceptable nine days previous was now a strange, unexpected occurrence. Again, a pattern emerges, coinciding with the three objectives listed above. The attribution of blame has shifted slightly: In place of blaming MOVE outright, it was the neighbours that 'demanded confrontation' to alleviate their suffering and therefore invited this tragedy into their lives. Mayor Goode is excused for his negligence of the neighbourhood's conflict due to the prescience of 1978.

This indirect approach dissipates in the 15 May editorial ('In the wake of disaster: Help the victims rebuild'). MOVE is condemned adamantly as opposed to the previous pieces in which there were attempts to render a sensible judgment of the group. The editorial proposes:

To keep the whole tragic affair in perspective, it must be remembered that it came about because MOVE had created intolerable conditions in a West Philadelphia neighborhood. If blame is to be assessed, MOVE must be at the top of the list.

This position is reinforced on 19 May ('Police-command failure worsened MOVE crisis'): "Nevertheless, primary blame for the violent confrontation belongs squarely on the MOVE anarchists. They rejected negotiation. Their obsession with destruction spawned it all."

The 16 May editorial exemplifies the third objective to preserve the city's image. Titled 'City rolls up its sleeves as the rebuilding begins,' the piece quickly establishes that the city is in the process of recovery, and that the spirit of Philadelphia's citizens is undiminished. While this may be a positive course to follow, it gives the appearance that the public is unconcerned with the loss of lives and the physical loss of a community.

The mettle of a city is measured by how it responds to tragedy, how it recovers from devastating blows, how it rises to the needs of victims who require not just sympathy but help, how it picks itself up and fights back. [...]

Both the image and substance of the city will be reflected in how it responds to the need of those in the devastated neighborhood. There is much encouragement in the response so far, but there is a long way to go.

This is the extent of the issues raised in the editorial pages of *The Inquirer*, and they adhere to the formula proposed above: attribution of blame, exculpation of Mayor Goode, and revival of the city's image. The tone exhibited by *The Inquirer* editorials is both one of chastisement and a rallying cry for Philadelphia to 'get it together' as a city. Thus its 'voice' is both therapeutic and paternalistic. It is therapeutic in that Philadelphians are not encouraged to critically assess the different stages of the conflict or the premise of the conflict itself. The deaths of the MOVE members and the long-lasting ramifications of the siege were effectively bypassed. Philadelphians are encouraged to 'pitch-in' to the relief effort and move on. While this may be a helpful formula for those in the aftermath of a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a hurricane, this situation was not the result of natural forces but the product of political processes.

In fact, the MOVE tragedy was often couched in the terms of a natural disaster or biological pathology. For example, MOVE was said to have struck Mayor Goode like a 'bolt of lightning,' or the group festered in the body like cancer. While sensational, these phrases do not capture the temporality of the situation (for MOVE did not just appear) nor the complexity with which MOVE interacted with both its neighbours and the city administration. The paper is paternalistic in the sense that it presents no other options for the Philadelphia community to cope with local conflict through its attempt to bring the readers in line with its projected perspective.

Considering the above analysis, *The Inquirer* exemplifies a flailing or faltering attempt at liberal reasoning. It must be asked why the paper espoused such a limited perspective on the MOVE conflict and the city's response to it. Part of the problem lies in the paper's investment in portraying the state (in this case, the mayor's office and law enforcement agencies) as an institutional structure invested in what is fair and best for the public good; therefore, any failures on its part resulted not from conceptual inadequacies,

indifference, or maliciousness, but from uncontrolled elements and unforeseen circumstances.

Also in this instance of liberal reasoning, the inadequacies of the police department were not a consequence of their approach, but the gratuitousness of force that was applied to MOVE. The degree of force is therefore the problem, not the use of force in and of itself. Therefore, the paper proclaimed on 11 August ('The credibility fallout as MOVE probe deepens') "there is cause to investigate official wrongdoing in that Osage Avenue battleground," but that "the police command was overwhelmed by its task is becoming increasingly apparent." Therefore the police department was remiss in its handling of the situation, but it was 'overwhelmed.' Similarly, Goode ineffectively managed the situation, but he was put in a difficult position. By qualifying the inadequacies in leadership by both Goode and the police department, *The Inquirer* effectively excused them from facing accountability in the matter.

Within the same editorial, the paper demonstrates its belief in the infallibility of 'the law.' Hence, "What began as an effort to uphold the law was, by the end of the day, an exercise in frustration, a police operation run amok." The editorial writers cannot come to terms with the possibility that such an operation could go wrong; they expect that things should go according to plan, that a democratic state is immune to such bungled operations of its own creation. Above all, the invocation of the law used in the MOVE conflict is never questioned or analysed. Were year-old arrest warrants and health-code citations adequate to the task of addressing the interests of the residents or the situation as a whole? Was the 'law' appropriated for a task outside its purview? Again, these types of questions regarding the role and responsibilities of the state were nonexistent.

B. *The Philadelphia Daily News*

In contrast to *The Inquirer*, *The Daily News* adopted a less formalised and authoritative voice in its editorial pieces and general content. The paper projects itself as a popular and

progressive daily newspaper, 'The People's Paper,' that reports on issues of relevance to the common, everyday person. This no-frills approach reveals itself in the simplistic headlines and titles, which often play on words (for example, 'Move on MOVE,' 3 May 1985) or are in the form of a clichéd phrase ('An eerie predawn scene,' 13 May). While less refined than the wording of *The Inquirer*, the use of imagery by *The Daily News* augments the impact of the pieces published in the paper.

The common appeal of *The Daily News* also rests in its investment in 'experience.' The tone is one of familiarity and camaraderie, such as one would speak to a brother, sister, or close friend. Therefore, there is less investment in legitimate authority figures than *The Inquirer*, which utilised Goode's office and social service agencies as reference points and primary sources. With *The Daily News*, more use is made of people on the street, the local grocer, MOVE sympathisers, individual police officers, and even prison inmates to speak of the events as they were unfolding. However the privileging of experience produces a notable degree of anti-intellectualism in certain articles. That is, the paper decries certain authority, expertise, and outside intervention into a local problem. As such, extreme views pervade both the articles as well as 'Letter's to the editor' with calls for vigilantism in avenging the deaths of MOVE members and that of Officer Ramp, as well as MOVE's treatment of its neighbours. Thus, where *The Inquirer* advocates blind adherence to the law, *The Daily News* retreats from it in an equal fashion.

The invocation of experience polarised support for or against MOVE, particularly in the 'Letters to the Editor' but also in the editorials. Thus, numerous 'what if's' prevailed. 'What if' MOVE members were your neighbours? 'What if' you were in a position like MOVE, and the government treated you similarly? Read, for example, an excerpt from *The Daily News*' editorial on 3 May, 'Move on MOVE':

Everybody who had brothers and sisters knows the technique. Every family has a kid who avoids doing things everybody else has to do by kicking up such a fuss that the parents stop asking. It works if nobody's got the will to enforce the rules.

The clowns with guns at MOVE have taken that technique and perfected it. [...]

MOVE's West Philadelphia neighbors have complaints that don't involve some airy, theoretical question of constitutional law. The various responses of city officials don't address any of the basic points the neighbors make. [...]

All of these are things that would never be permitted if other people did them. There are building codes, fire codes, sanitation codes, gun laws, anti-noise ordinances and criminal laws that apply to the rest of us.

In this piece, the appeal to experience, everyday rhetoric, and anti-intellectualism is in full force. Moreover, there is the sense of resentment in that MOVE is somehow enabled to get away with certain things that others would not, and as such, they should not be able to 'get over' on the rest of us. Therefore, MOVE should be put in its place. Although this editorial in particular, as well as a large degree of *The Daily News*' coverage in general, appears to resent the incursion of the state and the enforcement of law and order, it is also contravened by the call to have the law applied clearly and expediently in the case of MOVE so as to bring them in line with the rest of society.

The overall coverage of *The Daily News* contrasts with that of *The Inquirer* in its focus on the implications of 'race' for this particular conflict. Although the discussion on race was often reduced to stereotypes, such as the columns by Chuck Stone, by and large, *The Daily News* allowed for complex issues to emerge and be debated, whereas they were authoritatively silenced in *The Inquirer*. This muddles the overall content of the paper, but permits the recognition of the wavering political positions and attitudes that arose when race became an issue. Nevertheless, in considering the totality of the articles produced by *The Daily News*, its approach is by no means a radical one and is not that dissimilar from *The Inquirer*. It's apparent 'difference' arises from the playful personality in its regular columns and opinion pieces, not from the content of its hard-line news stories and editorials.

C. *The Philadelphia Tribune*

The Tribune differs from both *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News* in that its reporting and news production processes are geared towards the black community. Considering its

primary audience, *The Tribune* had more at stake with regard to its relationship to the public. As aforementioned, the paper's motto was "Voice of the Black Community since 1884," therefore many may have turned to its pages in search of guidance about the dilemma facing blacks in the aftermath of the MOVE debacle.

With specific regard to the MOVE situation, the paper had, through its own making, more crucial issues with which to contend. Primarily, Goode was of paramount significance, as *The Tribune* had vociferously supported his campaign and mayoralty. It was expected that he would lend a 'black' perspective and influence to Philadelphia and nationwide politics. The paper provided full backing to Goode's presence in the city thus making it a complicated exercise to retract that support. Also, the paper may have feared airing the black community's 'dirty laundry' for public consumption.

Due to the breaks in coverage resulting from the paper's irregular schedule, an analysis of *The Tribune* does not provide an adequate opportunity to assess the development of the coverage of MOVE in a similar fashion to that of *The Inquirer* and *The Daily News*. Absent from its pages are some of the routine 'hard' news features that prevailed in the other two papers, particularly in May 1985. *The Tribune's* editorial coverage, on the other hand, is characterised by the materialisation of two distinct motivations: to support an uprooted black neighbourhood and to protect Goode's image with the black Philadelphian community. The editorials on 17 May ('Municipal warfare in Phila.: Bombing image of civil order') and 21 May ('Love offerings can rebuild a fire-tortured community') display the religious and moral overtones used to urge black Philadelphians to show compassion for the displaced residents of Osage Avenue. Additionally, the first editorial on 17 May reveals signs for a serious critique of the Goode Administration.

Mayor W. Wilson Goode has proclaimed Sunday (May 19) a day of prayer for the families of those killed or left homeless in the MOVE siege and its flaming aftermath. That is good, for the city authorities' actions and pronouncements during the last several days should make everyone want to pray. [...]

What is left to differentiate the keepers of civilized order from the people we call terrorists.

The dropping of a bomb on a rowhouse to chase out a handful of people is a horrible precedent for the City of Philadelphia, a chilling precedent for action by the city's first Black, churchgoing mayor. The ability to feel compassion for others, even those we deem enemies, is something we should all pray to regain, this weekend and every other. For if the keepers of order become as willing to use extreme methods as the opponents of order, there will soon be no society left worth protecting.

In this excerpt, religious sentiments of compassion and acceptance are combined with criticism of the actions and rhetoric of the Goode Administration, thus putting to question the integrity of the mayor's own religious practice. However, this first editorial was the last to highlight such issues, as successive pieces evolved into a campaign to defend Goode's record with Philadelphia's black community.

Beginning with the 24 May editorial, 'Goode's commission: Let it get on with its work,' *The Tribune* began to deflect criticisms of Goode's conduct and urged that Philadelphians accept their responsibility in the evolution of the conflict. The article states, "Is the person who knowingly strikes the match that torches an entire neighborhood any less worthy of condemnation than the one who spread the fuel that fed the blaze?" The piece continues, "But fear and anger, even when coupled with disgust, inconvenience, and disturbance, are not valid reasons for taking someone else's life, *or even for demanding that the police do it for you.* Those are the emotions of a lynch mob, and Black people would do well to remember the scenes of the recent past." While encouraging social responsibility concerning the heightened tension surrounding the MOVE conflict is admirable on the part of *The Tribune*, deterring fair criticism of the Goode Administration and the newly formed Philadelphia Special Investigation Committee overshadows it. The 31 May editorial ('Why bomb the MOVE house? The questions keep coming') discusses wrongdoing on the administration's behalf, but the burden of blame is shifted to Police Commissioner Gregore Sambor and Managing Director Leo Brooks; Goode's role in the use of a bomb is neglected.

However, July heralded *The Tribune* in its campaigning role for Wilson Goode. In an editorial published 30 July titled 'Goode's record stands tall,' the paper evaluated the role that he had played in improving the welfare of Philadelphia's black citizens

during his term in office thus far. Importantly, readers were ‘prepped’ for this piece by a 26 July front-page article (the preceding publication) titled ‘Mayor defends city’s record with Blacks,’ which deploys an interview format, allowing Goode to make his pitch to the black community. The 30 July editorial rehearsed Goode’s argument and adopted his perspective as its own.

Mayor Goode has not asked anyone to forget the MOVE tragedy of May 13. He knows that would be impossible, anyway.

He has hoped that Philadelphia, and Philadelphia Blacks in particular, would also remember his “track” record for his first 18 months in office and trusts that his accomplishments would not be blurred by that fateful day in May.

The mayor firmly believes that Philadelphia has become a better city in which to live, thanks to his administration, and again that means better for Blacks, too. [...]

The mayor is convinced that his record stands tall, and based on his accomplishments, he has a strong argument in his favor.

Here, ‘the mayor’ supplants the voices of *The Tribune* and/or the black Philadelphian public. Goode’s assessment of his performance is accepted at face value and the achievements of his administration are measured quantitatively by the number of black people in office, the amount of money provided for black-owned businesses, and the like. While these numerical qualifications are not irrelevant, the MOVE conflict compromises such advances.

Through its editorial coverage, *The Tribune* circumvented Mayor Goode’s responsibility in order to represent him as a man still worthy of black Philadelphians support and respect. Perhaps the paper was concerned with not creating divisiveness in the black population at a time in which enough issues existed to polarise it politically. The paper had an explicit concern for the future of Democratic politics, therefore inviting Goode to redeem himself publicly. Without a resolution, Goode’s debacle could compromise the possibility of electing a black mayor for a second time, thus leading to the possibility of the Republicans gaining the mayoral office. Additionally, concern for the recently destroyed Osage Avenue community also meant that people were reluctant to criticise the mayor for fear that these families would be left without recourse to municipal assistance.

On the other hand, *The Tribune's* overall coverage exhibited a consistent volley between protecting Mayor Goode's reputation and coming to terms with the actuality of the deaths of the MOVE members and the destruction of a long-standing black neighbourhood. This reveals, perhaps, the struggle to reconcile the history of black resistance and activism in Philadelphia with the actions of a black-led administration. This debate also discloses the difficulty in categorising the MOVE members with reference to other local black struggles, as there was extreme polarity in terms of valorising or celebrating MOVE as a counterculture, or condemning them as antithetical to all that the 'black community' stands for. There is no closure to these questions in *The Tribune*, but in terms of the paper's voice on these issues through the form of the editorial, all issues were subordinated to the need to protect and preserve the image of Goode as an adequate and respectable leader for Philadelphia's black community then, and for the future.

III. The Visibility of the Media

The first section of this chapter provided an assessment of *The Inquirer*, *The Daily News*, and *The Tribune*, summarising the analysis of each paper's coverage. While *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6* provided the groundwork for this assessment, what has been omitted thus far is a consideration of the visibility of the media to the members of MOVE and the city administration as well as the public interaction between the media and these two parties. Often the process of news making remains unseen to the public, but in a few instances during this time period, news production was revealed as a constructed and controlled activity.

First, the media's consciousness of itself as tool subject to external manipulation will be discussed. The swiftness with which Goode appropriated the news medium was commented on frequently in the immediate aftermath of the MOVE siege. In particular, his deployment of press conferences were timely, tightly controlled, and effective in

terms of turning a potential tidal wave of anger and criticism into one of reverence and support. For example on 23 May *The Daily News* published a feature titled, 'The Mayor Mastered the Medium.'

Leave it to Mayor Goode to prove Marshall McLuhan wrong. The TV medium wasn't the message during last week's MOVE fiasco. It was the messenger. *Mayor Goode's messenger*. [...]

Questions may persist concerning Mayor Goode's handling of MOVE. There's no question, though, about his understanding of how to use television.

The mayor used press conferences as a forum in which to release information deemed appropriate and necessary, while sidelining requests from members of the press and wider public on other issues. The writer goes on to compare polling data from the Philadelphia area and from Southern California, where people had not seen the mayor's address, and reveals that two-thirds of Philadelphians gave Goode's performance an "excellent" or "good" rating, while less than fifty-percent of Californians gave him a positive rating. While such a comparison presents methodological complications, it is interesting in terms of contemplating the effect of Goode's media management.

Crucially, the mayor's office called for six press conferences between the 13th and the 17th of May, thus increasing the visibility of Goode during this time and positioning him as the authoritative source of information on all matters pertaining to MOVE. However, when the news media took the initiative to report its own findings in advance of official announcements or questioned the mayor's decisions, he denounced the papers publicly. On 15 May, *The Inquirer* published, 'After worst day of his career, Goode moves aggressively,' that detailed Goode's attempt to fault the press for the hasty actions taken to evict MOVE from Osage Avenue. He was quoted as saying that the media had "clamour[ed] at the top of its lungs for action" in resolving the MOVE conflict, and therefore, they were partly responsible for the resulting tension that led to the conflagration.

For example, *The Daily News* was the first to report the recovery of three bodies from the MOVE site and anticipated that the numbers would increase in the coming days.

Goode berated the paper for reporting these deaths and labelled its leadership

‘irresponsible.’ *The Daily News* responded on 15 May with a piece by Pete Dexter,

‘Defining Irresponsibility.’

I want to talk to you a little bit about MOVE again today, and Wilson Goode, and what Wilson Goode thinks is irresponsible, and about dropping bombs into residential neighborhoods. [...]

I mean, the man dropped a *bomb* in West Philadelphia.

All we did was report three bodies. And I would add here that even if we had been wrong – which we weren’t – it is easier to correct a newspaper story than 53 gutted houses. Anyway Wilson – who may have been trying to focus attention somewhere besides Osage Avenue – called the paper irresponsible because he had no “confirmation” of anybody having died. [...]

Along with this feature, *The Daily News* included another, ‘For the Record,’ that formally rejects Goode’s characterisation of the paper.

Early yesterday, the Daily News reported that at least three MOVE members were dead. At a midday press conference, Mayor Goode called the story “inaccurate and irresponsible,” adding that no bodies had been recovered.

The official death toll is now seven.

The Daily News rejects the need for Goode to officially confirm the details of the incident. The paper asserts its right to print material that is the result of investigations conducted by its reporting staff, thus expressing its willingness to confront authority.

The confrontation over the reporting of MOVE deaths filtered into *The Inquirer* as well. One of its columnists, Dorothy Storck, indirectly criticised Pete Dexter’s assessment of Mayor Goode. Dexter responds to this criticism in a 17 May article, ‘Of ‘Bold Strokes’ and ‘Hindsight’.’

And so from that dead, safe pond that has passed so long for “opinion” at the Philadelphia Inquirer, we have now begun to hear the “reasonable” view of the events that took place this week on Osage Avenue. [...]

Then in yesterday’s local section, I read a column titled “Finger pointing solves nothing” by Dorothy Storck. [...] Having covered the story, she reported yesterday that “Wilson Goode is taking a bum rap from some reporters in this town.” [...] “One columnist called Goode a ‘silly’ man. The Mayor may be slow to take action, he may be overly cautious – he has said that the confrontation is not his style. What the man is not is ‘silly.’” [...]

What I meant by silly was the spectacle of a human being posturing for political points after destroying a neighborhood. [...]

Don’t come to me with “finger pointing solves nothing.” That is one step removed from, “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.”

I can't say something nice, not yet, but that doesn't mean there aren't things that need to be said.

Through this commentary, the competitiveness between papers is evident.² Dexter perceives Storck's representation and subsequent criticism of his remarks as akin to censoring what is permitted in relation to the mayor's office. Furthermore, *The Inquirer* is portrayed as a dry newspaper that solicits favour from the city administration.

The tension between reporters for *The Daily News* and Goode's office resulted not only from a difference of opinion, but also from the police department's restrictions on the Osage Avenue area during and after the conflagration. On 15 May *The Inquirer* carried a small article, 'Restrictions are lifted on news media access,' detailing violations of the First and Fourth Amendments in the city's handling of the media. The article reported: "attorneys for The Inquirer obtained a federal court order requiring police to return camera film, a tape recorder and notebooks taken by police from two reporters and a photographer for the paper."

Again, *The Daily News* went further than *The Inquirer* in its criticism of the city administration by comparing the violations of news reporters' rights in Philadelphia to that of reporters covering conflicts abroad. On 22 May, the paper printed '...No Place to Discuss Constitutional Law,' which made the following allegations:

From the very beginning, police barricades kept reporters too far from what was happening to be able to report adequately. [...]

Daily News photographer Denis O'Keefe, actually detained for a while by police – with pistols drawn – says, "I was in Grenada; this was the same thing. . . the lessons of the Falklands War and Grenada are now being applied on a daily basis by the most minor of officials. As a photographer, all I can do is live with it. The street is no place to discuss constitutional law, especially with excited cops who are armed to the teeth." [...]

There sure were a lot of press conferences, which gave the *illusion* that the city was being open and informative, but in fact, they often weren't. Mayor Goode is a master at *seeming* to answer questions, but not really doing it.

Thus, the reporters allege that they felt threatened by the Philadelphia Police Department and disabled from effectively doing their jobs, contending that Goode used this situation to his advantage.

² Although one cannot neglect the papers' shared ownership.

IV. *The Media as a Resource for MOVE*

In contrast to the skilled deployment of the media demonstrated by Mayor Goode, MOVE was unsuccessful in utilising the media as a platform for its interests. Partly, the group proclaimed its disinterest in having 'legitimate' figures negotiate its position, a feature of previous cultural nationalist groups as discussed in *Chapter 2*.³ Nevertheless, the ability to access the media was constrained for a group who was at odds with the dominant social order. Gaye Tuchman characterises the news as a "stratified social resource," and as such:

The news media are more accessible to some social movements, interest groups, and political actors than to others. Those who hold recognized reins of legitimated power clearly have more access to the media than those who do not. Lower-class groups in particular are cut off from the media as a resource unless they recruit middle-class supporters who have routinized media contacts [...] attack those who attract media coverage, or recruit reporters to join their cause as "advocate journalists."⁴

Furthermore, Tuchman identifies the routine of news organisations as contributing to the reinforcement of institutional power.

Easy access to the news media requires ongoing contacts between a reporter and a news source, such as those provided by beats. Those who plan disruptive events do not have these contacts, because they are frequently suspicious of the media or may have other reasons, such as possible arrest, for *not* cultivating contact. In such cases, [...] reporters turn to their routine sources of information—those who, because of their institutional status, are in a central position to know what is going on. Such routine sources are, of course, the very people in power who are being attacked, and they are more willing to disparage their attackers. Again, standard reportorial practice legitimates those with institutional power.⁵

Tuchman's analysis thus identifies a group such as MOVE as "resource-poor" in gaining critical access to the media.

Unlike the black activism of civil rights leaders and Black Power groups, MOVE failed to establish a rapport with the mainstream media, and was not skilled in marketing

³ See Ch. 2, pp. 42-45.

⁴ Tuchman, *Making News*, pp. 133-134.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142. See also Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 2002/1988), p. 22. The authors assert that the use of routine sources is also a cost-effective strategy for the news media by reducing investment in ferreting out and supporting 'new' sources of information. Furthermore, the government encourages the media by facilitating the dissemination of information through a specific institutional structure that holds press conferences on issues they deem pertinent (i.e., the Goode Administration), as well as through the role press secretaries, etc. Unlike the position taken by Herman and Chomsky, I do not consider the media to be a direct propaganda tool for the powerful, although the media are predisposed to their position through media routines, and economic incentives.

itself. In some ways, this was beneficial, as the group did not suffer the consequences of celebrity leadership, or the divisiveness of media visibility.⁶ However, the members were unable to rebut or contend with the tide of information about them in the news media; neither did they succeed in eliciting the support of other outlets to combat disinformation. But in lacking a broadly accessible philosophical and activist platform, it is questionable whether the group would have had the adequate material to combat the negative representations of its members.

In adopting the posture of groups like the Panthers,⁷ and appropriating a simplistic Afrocentric discourse, the group had not formulated a conception of itself adequate to its mission. Thus, when necessitating a defence of themselves from physical and verbal assaults, they could not match this posture and were seen as empty and disposable.⁸

But in reconsidering Tuchman's statements above, MOVE did not attract middle-class supporters, but they did attack those "who attract[ed] media coverage": their immediate neighbours. In positing the usurpation of the Osage Avenue neighbours' position by MOVE, thus damagingly using them as a 'resource,' this returns us to the quandary identified in *Chapter 5*: Does MOVE meet the definition of 'terrorists,' based upon the nature of this relationship?

If one reviews the prolonged anxiety experienced by MOVE's neighbours, the group could be considered as 'terrorising' others through their use of the loudspeaker and general conduct. But, on the other hand, this anxiety resulted from the city administration's policy of non-intervention and ignorance, coupled with a strategy of

⁶ See Todd Gitlin's, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the new left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

⁷ The group often posed with weaponry, mimicking the style of the Panthers. Also, it adopted organisational terms from the Panthers such as 'Minister of Information,' etc. Gitlin proposes that groups or social movements often recognise themselves "through mass-mediated images." Therefore, the identity of MOVE was motivated in some ways by the Black Panthers and others. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸ McAdam, "The framing function of movement tactics: Strategic dramaturgy in the American civil rights movement," pp. 338-355 in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 349.

overt surveillance and policing *without* actual protection.⁹ Thus, the administration figures greatly in the creation of the sense of urgency experienced by the Osage Avenue residents.

Therefore, in retrospect, the residents of Osage Avenue were subject to the image-consciousness and political motivations of the Goode Administration as well as the abuse perpetuated by MOVE. Both MOVE and the administration portended to 'represent' the interests of the residents, and in doing so, violently arrested their ability to act freely and live without constraint. Ultimately, however, it was the deployment of violence and display of militaristic power by the Philadelphia city administration that destroyed a portion of the Cobbs Creek Park community and took the lives of eleven MOVE members.

V. *Summary*

In this chapter, the three Philadelphian newspapers were reviewed, as well as an attempt to come to terms with the use of the news media by the city administration and the MOVE members. Ultimately, an evaluation of the totality of the news coverage is an impossibility. However, through the formal element of the editorial, generalisations can be made regarding each paper's voice on the pertinent issues of the day. Through the editorial, none of the papers—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Philadelphia Daily News*, or *The Philadelphia Tribune*—ventured outside of the boundaries of discussion defined by the Goode Administration, although alternative considerations arose in feature articles, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. In this example of social change and upheaval, the print news media remained committed to authority. It coped with this local conflict by

⁹ See Williams, "Police Brutality: Case Study of Philadelphia/MOVE," (PhD diss., Dept. of Political Science, Atlanta University, July 1988), p. 20. She states: "The paradox of the Black community is that it is administered by outsiders, the inhabitants are denied control and are excluded from full participation in the system; yet, they are still forced to finance their own oppressive police force, welfare system, and also '...lend their approval to laws which potentially contribute to [their] alienation.' " Original brackets.

readily adopting the most available discourses of the time period. In this, the media provided security for the reader in falling along predictable lines of inquiry and explanation. In this instance, the analysis of the media through a consideration of discourse is beneficial in revealing the manner in which the discussion of MOVE was framed or contextualised in light of political considerations and issues dominating the national and local agendas, and the way in which the media functions to both create and interpret 'events' for the public.

Additionally, the issue of the news media as a resource, both for local government and activist groups/movements was addressed. The ability of MOVE to access the mainstream media was constrained by its position as a "resource-poor" group, but also by its own unwillingness to interact with outside sources. This, combined with Wilson Goode's attempts to legitimate himself and the city administration through a series of public appearances, served to prohibit the group from contesting the media's characterisations of its motivations and demands. In this, MOVE was unsuccessful in questioning institutional power structures and relaying its political platform to the public.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

The Limitations of Blackness as a Political Strategy

In reviewing the content and the form of this study, a movement from the macro- to the micro-political enables one to fully conceptualise the social contributions of a group such as MOVE, *in its own time*. In returning to the initial proposal regarding MOVE's role in illuminating the functioning and limitations of black American politics, this study has addressed this hypothesis through a consideration of national political trends in the United States, as well as the changing political environment at the municipal level in cities such as Philadelphia.

In part, this inquiry into MOVE was conceived as a rejection of two tendencies within black American cultural and political research and criticism. The first involves the current preoccupation with romanticising the 'resistance' of black activist groups, whatever their motivations and actions, thus functioning as what we might term 'pernicious praise.' This exists in both studies originating from within the country, as well as those from Europe and elsewhere, among those specialising in difference, culture, and identity. Notably, the oeuvre of Paul Gilroy has been mobilised to generalise a study of black American culture, such that the complexity of black activism has been obscured. While recognising the contributions of his work, a preoccupation with black musical culture,¹ and a highly selective rendering of black diasporic intellectual thought, does

¹ Music is a focal point for discussing black American culture and politics, and this is problematic because it has become the predominant point of entry in terms of discussing black American culture. Gilroy's work is symptomatic of an academic preoccupation with black American culture to 'its' music (and a very narrow definition of music at that). In Gilroy's case, equating black American culture and black American music while simultaneously negating other black cultures are both a consequence of his inadvertent construction of a transcendental blackness under which all black peoples are subsumed; music is the medium enabling black individuals to participate in this transcendental blackness. Through music, blacks *necessarily* resist the oppressive societies in which they exist as well as the means through which capitalism is thwarted. In other words, 'black expressive cultures' (the term utilised by Gilroy to address black music, dance, art, fashion, etc.) possess the inherent ability to resist oppression in any form. Furthermore, if one maps the progression of his work, black expressive cultures become equated with black politics, which is equated with an emancipatory black social movement. What remains is black expressive cultures = black social movements, which is a rather dangerous and fundamentally inadequate formulation. Additionally, this focus has a generational component, in that its focus is largely on 'youth.' The dismissal of the political and economic elements of black cultures in Gilroy's work occurs in part due to his aversion to nationalism or nationalist movements. In the rush to embrace diaspora, trans-

little to illuminate those traditions within their respective geographical, historical, and cultural locations. The focus on music, particularly hip-hop, rap, and reggae, is somewhat predictable due to its prominence in twentieth and twenty-first century consumer culture, thus facilitating the popularity of these studies. Therefore, the consumerism of black music correlates with the proliferation of academic studies about them.²

The second tendency involves a resurgence of studies concerning the inherent ills of the black community, thus reinvigorating the 'black pathology industry' as elucidated in *Chapter 2* with a focus on the Sociology of the Negro. Scholars such as Cornel West pontificate on the 'nihilism' of the black community, while simultaneously resuscitating the self-help ideology of neo-conservatives such as Thomas Sowell and Glenn Loury as discussed in *Chapter 3*.³ This position has also proved to be a lucrative academic

Atlanticism, and hybridity—all globalising terms—the particularities and potentialities of national movements within and outside of the Anglo-American picture are condemned for their essentialisms, for their often-militant tactics, as well as their limited class politics. While one cannot disagree with these criticisms (and they have a place in this study as well), they are not sufficient to discount the contributions of nationalist movements to a wider emancipatory project. The point is that if Gilroy had taken account of the specificities of the locale and political climate—the context—of the musical genres considered in his work, perhaps the proposition of music leading to a transcendental and emancipatory blackness would have been rendered untenable. See his *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1987), particularly Ch. 5: 'Diaspora, utopia and the critique of capitalism,' pp. 153-222; see also *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), especially Ch. 3: '“Jewels Brought from Bondage”: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity,' pp. 72-110.

² See Michelle Wallace's "Afterword: 'Why Are There No Great Black Artists?' The Problem of Visuality in African-American Culture" pp. 333-346 in Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), p. 345. She writes: "One more thing. There is by now too vast an array of compelling narratives in which African-American music is the founding discourse of the African-American experience. Indeed, African music is the founding discourse of the diaspora, and that is probably as it should be. But, for my part, I am at war with music, to the extent that it completely defines the parameters of intellectual discourse in the African-American community. For me, the self-limiting paradigm is [...] musical production."

³ For example, West writes: "Yet many black folk now reside in a jungle with a cutthroat morality devoid of any faith in deliverance or hope for freedom." See p. 41 of "Nihilism in Black America," pp. 37-47 in Dent, *Black Popular Culture*. Although West denies any affinity with 'pathology' studies, his analysis plays on the same tropes of family and psychology. Music production is often an operative medium of analysis in West's assessment of nihilism, thus reinforcing the predominance of this mode of cultural production. For a critique of West on this aspect of his scholarship, see Eric Lott's "Cornel West in the Hour of Chaos: Culture and Politics in *Race Matters*," *Social Text* 40, vol. 12, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 39-50. Lott also acknowledges that West's analyses of black America are also motivated by a desire to establish a consensus within and among the fragmented Left, as he was the co-chair of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Thus, West is "constrained" by this affiliation as a consequence of representing the interests of this disjointed coalition.

enterprise, as those espousing this philosophy have been deemed the new cultural 'leadership' for black Americans.⁴

Therefore, in the context of academic studies of black American culture and politics, there is little impetus to return to often underrated moments, such as that involving MOVE, and to critically assess what these groups had to offer and actually accomplished other than being black and resisting, or being black and pathological.⁵ Again, uncritically affirming or uncritically denigrating black culture and political practice does not contribute to societal transformation or further understanding, as both are reflective of conservative politics. These two impulses in studies of black American life are a disservice to the complexity of relations characterising the black American population particularly and the United States generally.

I. Overview

In *Chapter 2*, an inquiry into 'blackness' was fundamental to an understanding of the way in which black Americans are permitted to enter the formal political arena. Partly, this focus on blackness evolved from numerous sociological studies ranging from the culture-of-poverty theses of Myrdal, Frazier, and Moynihan, to the ubiquitous presence of 'underclass' terminology in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. In turn, this manner of sociological analysis remains doggedly dependent upon a fictive, unified black community. Additionally, the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate initiating this chapter via references to James Baldwin, Stuart Hall, and Hortense Spillers, contributed to the deconstruction of this simplistic or 'innocent' notion of black community and black American culture, as did the astute theoretical contributions of Rey Chow through her

⁴ In considering another canonical figure in black American studies at present in terms of celebrity and influence, literary scholar Henry Louis Gates would also have a seat at the table with Gilroy and West.

⁵ It is important to recognise that the romanticisation of black culture also descends from outmoded Marxist formulations that put forth blacks and other people of colour as the vanguard of the anti-capitalist and worker's movement.

explicit focus on the element of gender, which facilitated a crucial re-evaluation of the suitability of 'race' as the foundation for an oppositional community. Thus, this chapter occupies a pivotal role within the thesis generally, as it is the destabilisation of blackness and black community that encourages a renewed investigation into the circumstances surrounding the MOVE conflict. Of particular significance is the element of race, an element that was sidelined, by and large, in the preceding studies on MOVE presented in *Chapter 1*.

Chapter 3 shifted from the above theoretical exposition to a focus on the predominance of liberalism in American political thought and practice. A critique of liberalism through Uday S. Mehta's notion of liberal exclusivity, and the allied political analyses of Melanie Njeri Jackson, Rhonda Williams, and Floyd W. Hayes III in the specific context of the Reagan revolution, enabled the establishment of a macro-political foundation for a pointed consideration of urban municipal politics.

The framework of Colburn and Adler's volume on black American mayors facilitated the recognition of the complex political, economic, and cultural factors impinging upon this generation of black municipal leaders, as well as the overwhelming burden of representing the black population in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Nevertheless, this burden of representation could not negate nor sufficiently counter the contradictions within the nation's liberal framework, thus failing to improve the daily lives of millions of Americans, black or otherwise. In this transformative moment where the civil rights legacy was met with the aggressive economic and humanitarian retrenchment of the Reagan Administration, black leaders failed not only to advance the interests of black Americans, but also to protect the meagre gains produced by the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement.

For the most part, the creation of W. Wilson Goode's mayoral candidacy in Philadelphia bore out the political trends presented in Colburn and Adler's collection. Elucidating the historical framework of the Reagan era as well as Philadelphia's municipal politics afforded an important field of reference for the portrayal of

Philadelphia and MOVE through the lens of the print news media. *Chapter 4* provided the methodological justifications for the type of media analysis undertaken in the ensuing three chapters. The adoption of a critical discourse analytical approach facilitated connections between the media and the broader historical and socio-political context. Thus the methodological framework employed in the analysis of the media was integral to the approach deployed throughout the study.

In *Chapter 5*, the use of a critical discourse analytical approach to a small case study of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Philadelphia Daily News*, and *The Philadelphia Tribune* demonstrated how racial, economic, and political concerns, condensed into the discourses of terrorism, the Vietnam War, and race, produced a media spectacle featuring MOVE. Indeed, as a 'media event,' MOVE reveals more about the failure of democratic processes and the continuing subordination of blacks in America than about itself. This explains why, after the initial flurry and furore over MOVE's 'terrorism' and the loaded invocations of the Vietnam War, the print news coverage dramatically shifted towards Mayor W. Wilson Goode's leadership ability and accountability in the aftermath of the Cobbs Creek Park conflagration, as explicitly discussed in *Chapter 6*. Therefore, although MOVE was the principal actor in the beginning of the 'event,' Goode supplanted the group as the dominant focal point. In the end, MOVE and the city's handling of the group tested the legitimacy of the mayor's leadership and his allegiance to 'black' interests, for blacks and whites alike. Recall that this was the principal concern in the 1983 mayoral election, as discussed in *Chapter 3*. Therefore, one can observe the necessity of considering the political state of America in the Age of Reagan as well as the importance of 'blackness' in the public's imagination.

Furthermore, through the formal element of the editorial, assessments were made regarding each paper's 'voice.' *Chapter 7* also considered the issue of the news media as a resource, both for Philadelphia's municipal players and MOVE. The accessibility of the mainstream media to MOVE was constrained by its lack of resources as well as its hesitancy to develop external contacts. This, combined with the city's skilful strategies to

control the output of information to the public, prohibited the group from contesting the media's characterisations of its motivations and demands. Progressing from this last point regarding MOVE's inability to make a successful intervention into the consciousness of the wider public, the next section will reconsider MOVE's status as a social movement.

II. MOVE as an Anti-Social Movement

Although the potentialities of MOVE were posed in *Chapter 1*, the actual manifestations of the group and its philosophy were not as positive as initially forecast. While the reality of any individual or group bears this mark, MOVE radically departed in action from its liberationist rhetoric and was, in fact, parasitic upon others to further its individual goals and needs. However, in taking account of the specificity of MOVE, the group simply failed to communicate its objectives to the public, regardless of racial or ethnic identifications or political affiliation, particularly in its second stage in 1980s' Osage Avenue. The group adopted a proselytising role, and thus was disinterested in accomplishing broad-based social change. Its activities were designed simply to make space for the members and convert others to its cause.

In earlier chapters, an evaluation of MOVE as a social movement was deferred, although the group was loosely characterised as a cultural nationalist group. This was done, in part, to permit a full assessment of the group's activities, its interaction with the media, its neighbours, and the city administration, as well as the ability of the group to project its objectives and philosophy to others. In reconsidering the entirety of the material reviewed, MOVE, as an activist group, does not constitute a social movement, but an *anti-social movement*.

This terminology is inspired by Alain Touraine, and his attempt to come to terms with the ubiquity of 'activist' groups and the problematic of collective action.⁶ Touraine

⁶ See Alain Touraine, *Can We Live Together?: Equality and Difference*, trans. by David Macey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000/1997), esp. Ch. 3: 'Social Movements.'

links the rush to name any collective action as a 'movement' to an expression of nostalgia for revolutionary time periods, in order to make sense out of current societal conditions. However, this process often obscures the particularities of various moments of collective action and 'resistance.'

Although Touraine's argument is extensive, his distinctions between a *societal* movement and an anti-social movement reference a single principle: A societal movement is never reducible to a mechanism for a political ideology, strategy, or self-interest; thus it never trumps the freedom of the subject.⁷ From this, one can deduce that a societal movement must have a transcendent vision, one that surpasses the exigencies of the here and now. Of particular interest for an understanding of MOVE, is the condition that a societal movement cannot be reduced to a simplistic defence of identity.

Recall that categorising MOVE was a difficult task, as over the years, it blended everything from 1960s environmentalist and communal counterculture, to an Afrocentric religiosity, to the posturing of militant revolutionary nationalists, thus constituting a 'pastiche' of the 'new' social/cultural movements. In light of Touraine's definition, MOVE was symptomatic of the disintegration of the American Civil Rights Movement; that is, MOVE represented the faltering tail end of the revolutionary fervour of the 1960s and 1970s that had reached its limit in transforming the structure of American society, and then began to turn inwards to a piecemeal defence of fragmented group interests and ideologies. As discussed in *Chapter 3*, the Civil Rights Movement expressed a coming together of various humanitarian ideals of freedom and human rights, as well as practical political interests, but was condensed into a programmatic strategy for routine political inclusion. Therefore, the transformative potential of this civil rights moment was set aside in favour of national belonging. Consequently, groups such as MOVE can be conceived as an expression of this incomplete transformation, and the severing of the cultural impetus of this time period from the political and economic structure of the nation. The

⁷ Touraine replaces 'social' with 'societal' to distinguish collective actions that "challenge society's general orientations." Ibid., p. 90.

group confirms that the best instances of this era had been commercialised into disconnected living patterns, consumer trends, and disjointed philosophical rhetoric; this is evidenced by the failure to transform the group's objectives into an active democratic political platform, formal or informal.

As suggested in *Chapter 1*, MOVE had the potential to conceive of citizenship outside the boundaries of formal, 'legitimate' politics, and sought neither to assimilate into American society, nor to explicitly divorce from it. However, this potential was not translated into the MOVE members' activities and conduct towards others. Their philosophy, although contesting the dominant social order, was premised upon maintaining the survival of the group and defending a limited set of interests, namely the release of imprisoned members. Furthermore, the success of their projects often depended upon the ability of others to conform to an established set of guidelines that were authoritarian in some respects.

Because MOVE was rigid in its approach to attracting members, the group had limited ability to transcend the confines of its own locale. In place of considering alternatives for opening up the space for more freedom of difference or expression, the group insisted on the preservation of its freedom and exalted only those who agreed to live in an approved lifestyle. Their primary objective was the reconstruction of a specific black identity premised on authenticity. This signals a return to a fictive, destructive notion of an essential blackness as illuminated in *Chapter 2*. Thus, MOVE asserted the validity of its cultural practice primarily through 'black' identification.

Although the MOVE members had the potential to contest and increase awareness of the dominant political order, their actions limited the group's efficacy from the beginning. And, in practice they were not dissimilar from the traditional black leadership they so abhorred, as they usurped the position of those around them in order to press for their own demands, thus returning to MOVE's usage of their neighbours as a 'resource' in *Chapter 7*. There was no room for a democratic exchange with MOVE in the later stages of its presence in Philadelphia, particularly on Osage Avenue. If it had

been interested in broad-based social justice for black Americans, the group failed to portray this through its conduct. Of course, this does not preclude the recognition of the group's positive qualities and actions, nor its horrific and brutal treatment at the hands of the state. But in relation to the wider society, the group had little to offer aside from scathing invectives, thus revealing the paucity of political tools available to it.⁸ Freedom is then reduced to conforming to MOVE's way of life; there is no space for difference of opinion, or a questioning of the group's purpose.

Stemming from this argument, MOVE is also an anti-social movement because it thrived on self-marginalisation on Osage Avenue; the group purposefully inhabited a space that was antithetical to the needs and interests of those around it. The group conceived of this space as 'bourgeois' and reduced all to a caricature of this position. Although this self-marginalisation is questionable in itself, it becomes more so once we realise that the group actively maintained these barriers for the most part, and required that its neighbours conform to this stereotype in order to make its own political position tenable. Therefore, its objectives and organisational purpose were dependent upon the stagnant presence of its neighbours. Practically, as well, the Osage Avenue neighbours were used as leverage for the group in dealing with the city. Aware that the neighbourhood desired bourgeois-ness, the group besmirched this image in order to assert the superiority of its alternative, 'authentic' lifestyle. The liberationist spaces made available by MOVE's re-conceptualisation of black American identity were immediately foreclosed and compromised by its authoritarian posture towards others and its inability to participate in collective political action.⁹

⁸ Adolph Reed reminds us that repression, along with cooptation, is faced by all oppositional movements and is therefore integral to contesting the dominant social structure. Thus the mere fact of being repressed does not alleviate one from the need to theorise beyond this experience. See "Introduction" pp. 3-10 in Reed, *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 8.

⁹ Suzanne Ife Williams goes further in her assessment of MOVE's role in Philadelphia. She states: "MOVE dominated the scene in Philadelphia and paralyzed the efforts of Blacks to focus on other political issues in 1978 and again in 1985." See pp. 243-244 in "Police Brutality: Case Study of Philadelphia/MOVE," (PhD diss., Dept. of Political Science, Atlanta University, July 1988).

To some extent, the exposition of the two tendencies within the study of black American culture and politics provided at the opening of this chapter—the romanticisation of ‘resistance’ and the defence of pathology—justify the extensive lengths employed to situate MOVE in historical, political, economic, and cultural terms, to get at what MOVE *means* in a specific context. Thus moving from a national to a local political context provides the material to demonstrate that MOVE was not exemplary in its philosophy, nor did the group contribute to furthering the challenges posed by the post-civil rights era. Instead, MOVE paradigmatically represents the decay of these impulses in black American political culture.

III. The Desire to Punish

In seeking to summarise this study on MOVE, there remains the pull to moralise upon the situation, or to determine who was the most victimised and by whom in the course of events presented in the various levels of analysis. But if anything is to be gained from this particular context, there are no absolutes and no monopolies on morality by any party involved. In grappling with the complex social relations structuring the MOVE event, a phrase put forth by William E. Connolly—‘the desire to punish’—is particularly salient to this situation.¹⁰

‘The desire to punish’ stems from the revengeful impulses experienced by those who perceive their established identity to be under threat or compromised by others. In Connolly’s analysis, the ‘other’ is racially marked, such that he or she becomes the focus of social fear and anxiety.

“The Desire to Punish” is an exercise in micropolitics. I argue that contemporary categories of agency, responsibility, crime, and punishment are porous forms readily infiltrated by a drive to revenge against culturally marked constituencies whose very being threatens the self-certainty of established identities.¹¹

¹⁰ See Connolly’s *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), esp. Ch. 2: ‘The Desire to Punish,’ pp. 41-74. It is worth noting that Foucault’s work is the motivating factor behind Connolly’s inquiry.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxv.

While Connolly concedes that his purpose is “not to drain every ounce of revenge from desire,” it is to identify how revenge structures and reproduces itself through legal and political systems. In returning to the discussion presented in *Chapter 3*, Connolly’s coinage is appropriate to the Reagan Administration’s anti-civil rights policy and retrenchment.¹²

Therefore, the desire to punish is manifest at the national or macro-political level, but in adhering to Connolly’s micro-political account, it is also present in the sentiments expressed by MOVE’s neighbours on Osage Avenue, the Goode Administration, as well as MOVE itself. MOVE sought revenge for the maltreatment and questionable imprisonment of its members, and subsequently exacted punishment on its ‘middle-class’ neighbours in order to gain the attention of the city. The Osage Avenue residents punished MOVE, not only for the physical threat of the MOVE members, but also the symbolic threat MOVE presented to its sense of community and civic-mindedness. Lastly, the city administration exacted punishment on MOVE, for the group’s challenges to ‘civilised’ society and its previous confrontations with law enforcement, as well as the Osage Avenue neighbourhood, for publicly elevating its concerns in the media and placing demands that tarnished the reputation of the city’s leadership.¹³ Thus, a skewed sense of retributive justice is present in similar ways throughout this web of relations.

In Connolly’s exposition, the mass media occupies a crucial role in amplifying the desire to punish. Dramatised courtroom proceedings, arrests captured on videotape, and the excess of violence in the media all contribute to this problematic. Through the

¹² In this chapter, Neil Smith’s comparable term ‘revanchism’ was also introduced, describing the combination of revenge and reaction. See p. 66 n24.

¹³ Steve Martinot notes: “Defence of one’s humanity or self-respect can also be construed as an actual assault on the law if the officer decides to assault that self-respect violently. This goes beyond the mere criminalisation of behaviour that it relies on; it constitutes the ability to criminalise a person’s personhood and sense of justice itself.” See p. 211 of “The Militarisation of the Police,” *Social Identities*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2003): 205-224. MOVE’s defence of its identity was rendered as an assault on the law when the city responded to this identity violently, thus excusing the city’s own use of force. Also, reconsidering the title of Margot Harry’s account, “*Attention MOVE! This is America!*,” which derives from Police Commissioner Sambor’s utterance to MOVE as the city began its siege on the MOVE residence, confirms the attitude that MOVE was not of America, thus lacking the entitlements of citizenship.

media analysis of the events leading into, during, and after the 13 May 1985 conflagration in Philadelphia, we have observed the steady augmentation of the ‘threat’ that MOVE posed to its neighbourhood, the city, the state, and the nation as a whole. This was accomplished specifically through the discourses of war and terrorism. In some instances, the discourses characterising MOVE evolved to encompass the black population generally by virtue of an assumed racial affinity with MOVE, thus making blacks anywhere a threat to whites everywhere. The state violence used to subdue the MOVE members, as well as the extension of this violence into the heart of black Philadelphia, thus symbolise the degree to which black Americans and other marginalised constituencies remain excluded from liberal conceptions of freedom, democracy, and equal protection under the law, as well as the application thereof.

Therefore, returning to Connolly’s principal preoccupation, the legal system has institutionalised the desire to punish such that those marked as culturally or racially different (deficient) are punished disproportionately as a means to reinforce and protect the integrity of a faulty legal and political system. In the MOVE situation, jurisprudence was bypassed for a symbolic/ritualistic resolution through the medium of violence. Thus, “[w]e remain resolutely silent about legal violence, about the sacrifice of entire constituencies to stabilize uncertain cultural practices through which we receive protection, dignity, and transcendence.”¹⁴

The Limitations of Blackness as a Political Strategy seems an apposite conclusion for this inquiry into MOVE, as well as an opening into others concerning black American culture and politics. ‘Blackness’ and coming to terms with its usage has been the underlying motivation of this study. Its deployment in condemning black Americans, as well as patronisingly exalting them, represent the two poles between which academic studies often fall. In this study, invoking the authority and authenticity—the *essence*—of blackness, as the driving imperative of politics in its multifarious guises, has resulted in the failure to conceive of a transformative politics. While mobilising a population under

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

the pretext of an authentic identity may present the first steps toward political involvement, it inevitably becomes a fundamentalist movement, obsessed with and thwarted by the need to affirm and police this identity, both from within and without. Thus, in the end, 'blackness' is its own limit, condemning its attractors and detractors to an interminable narcissism of identity politics.

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